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NIGHT SCENES OF THE BIBLE.

First Series.

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Night Scenes of the Bible,

1873

AND

THEIR TEACHINGS.

FIRST SERIES.

BY THE

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INCUMBENT OF AMBLESIDE,

AUTHOR OF "FAITH IN EARNEST," "MINERS' SONS," "BLANCHE NEVILLE," ETC.

THIRD EDITION.

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PREFACE.

Events, bearing not alone on the fate and fortunes of individuals, but on the destinies of the world and of the Church, are related in the Bible as having taken place during the still and solemn hours of the Night. Truths of the deepest importance were revealed through the visions vouchsafed to holy men of old, when their eyes were sealed in slumber, and they lay rapt in heavenly trance or prophetic dream. Of many a patriarch, and priest, and seer, it may be said that—

> "In night's starry shade
> Of dim and solitary loveliness,
> They learned the language of another world."

The following pages form the substance of several discourses which were grounded on some of those remarkable incidents and those stirring events which are mentioned in the Scriptures as occurring at night. That the Night Scenes of the Bible and their Teachings possessed an interest for those who heard them as sermons, was evidenced

by the gratifying wish of many to have them in an enduring form. These volumes were originally published in response to an expressed wish for their publication; and were sent forth in the hope that the subjects treated in them might not be without some interest for others, and that "the things new and old," which the Author had sought to bring out of his treasures, might be found profitable for the instruction in righteousness of those who might read them.

It only remains to say that, although the discourses have been printed in the shape of chapters, it was found impossible to remove entirely the form of pulpit address, which has, therefore, in a certain degree, been retained. It is necessary to mention this, that there may appear to the reader to be nothing incongruous between the form in which the subjects treated in the following pages have been published, and the style of their composition.

Nothing need be added but to commend the volume to the blessing of Him, "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy."

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

In sending forth a Third Edition of these volumes, the Author desires to express his thankfulness for the many testimonies to their usefulness which he has received, and for the interest which, in some instances, they have awakened in the Word of God. He hopes that the altered form of the present edition, and the more equal size of the two volumes, will be found to be an improvement. That God may give them His blessing,—that He who fed the multitude with a few barley loaves and a few small fishes, may repeat the mountain miracle, and feed and refresh the soul with what seems so insufficient, is the Author's earnest prayer and desire.

Cheltenham,
October, 1873.

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CHAPTER I.

The Night of Promise.

"ALL THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE YEA AND AMEN IN CHRIST JESUS."

"And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."—GENESIS XV. 5, 6.

The Night of Promise.

"Sorrows," it has been said, "come not single spies, but in battalions." And not unseldom does one blessing follow quickly on another. So fared it with the favoured Abram, "Friend of God," and "Father of the faithful." After his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him at "the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale," he was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God. Carrying in his hands bread and wine, this Melchizedek, type of a greater Priest yet to come, blessed the victorious Abram, and said, "Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand. And he gave him tithes of all." The king of Sodom, moreover, grateful for the effectual help rendered by Abram and his servants against his enemies, besought him to accept the spoil which he

had recovered from the confederate kings. But Abram refused, saying, "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich; save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eschol, and Mamre; let them take their portion." But higher grace is in store for Abram than the blessing of Melchizedek, or the praise and applause of man. He returns home with his victorious retainers, and retires to his tent after the heat and burden of the day. Night settles down upon his household, and the patriarch seeks that tranquil sleep which "God giveth to His beloved." When his eyes are sealed in slumber, "the Word of the Lord appears to him in a vision." "The Word of the Lord!" The title given to the Divine Being who approaches the sleeping patriarch arrests our attention. Here is something into which, like the angels bending over the mercy-seat, "we desire to look."

Let it be remarked, then, that here, for the first time, is Jehovah introduced to us under the title, afterwards so common, "The Word of the Lord." For there can be no doubt that this is He who appeared unto Abram when he was in Mesopotamia, and summoned him to leave his country and his

kindred, and who is called by Stephen, "the God of glory." And there can be no debate on the point that this "Word of the Lord," this "God of glory," is the same with that Divine Person of whom the Evangelist John, centuries later, speaks in the opening chapter of his Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." Who knows not that throughout the Old Testament mention is made of a mysterious Being, who sometimes appeared as a man, and sometimes as an angel, and who was addressed as "Jehovah" by those to whom He displayed His power? No finite, no created being this. He spake in the name of God, acted with the authority of God; and they who beheld His glory acknowledged with wondering awe and astonishment, that they stood in the presence of God. We are justified, therefore, in coming to the conclusion that it was none other than the Second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, who did thus anticipate His incarnation, and by a visible manifestation of Himself as a gracious God administered comfort and encouragement to His people in the early ages of the world. All these visible appearances of the Invisible were intended to keep alive in the hearts of the chosen nation the

hope of a coming Deliverer, the promised Seed, who in the fulness of time should "bruise the serpent's head." Scripture warrants us in believing that it was Christ who again and again held converse with Abram; Christ who, at Peniel, wrestled with Jacob "until the breaking of the day:" Christ who appeared to Moses on the Mount of Sinai; Christ who, as Captain of the Lord's hosts, bade Joshua loose his shoes from off his feet, because "the place on which he stood was holy." Of Abram it is said, "He rejoiced to see Christ's day; he saw it, and was glad." Of Moses it is said, "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." On one occasion it is said of the Israelites, "They drank of the Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ;" on another, that "they tempted Christ in the wilderness, and were destroyed of serpents." Of Isaiah it is said — alluding to his sublime vision of the Lord sitting upon His throne, and adored by the Seraphim who with veiled faces cry, Holy, holy, holy—"He saw Christ's glory, and spake of Him." And do not these statements fully establish the pre-existence of Christ, and the actual Deity of Christ? For if we find it stated that "no man hath seen God at any time;" and yet find it also affirmed that it was God who appeared unto Abram; God with whom Jacob wrestled; God before whom Joshua worshipped; God whom Isaiah saw sitting upon a throne, high

and lifted up, and whose train filled the temple; God against whom "the people murmured"—how can these statements be reconciled, unless by the unqualified acknowledgment of the truth that "God was in Christ" from the earliest ages of the Church; that it was the eternal Son, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person," who appeared in visible form to favoured patriarchs and privileged prophets of old?

It is most interesting to observe how "the Word" was always the Revealer of the Father; how, from the hour of the fall, He was the one and only Mediator between God and man, how He was ever the single channel of communication between heaven and earth. Most appropriate, therefore, His name, "The Word of the Lord!" "The Word;" because the Revealer. "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." God "speaks" to us through Christ; through Him lays bare to us the thoughts of His heart, discloses the counsels of His will, and makes known to us the good pleasure of His grace. So here, in the person of the "Logos," or Word, Jehovah comes to Abram in a vision, and gives him "promises exceeding great and precious,"— promises, "not one jot or tittle of which can pass away, till all be fulfilled."

The Patriarch is evidently startled and alarmed

at the voice and the vision. To reassure him "the Word of the Lord" speaks the gracious words of encouragement, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." There is a reference in these words to the events which had lately taken place, when Abram, having gone out to do battle with the four kings, had rescued Lot from their hands, and put their armies to flight. And "the Word of the Lord" now reminds him of this, and says, "I am thy shield." "I it was, who covered thy head in the day of battle." "I am thy exceeding great reward." I not only gave thee the victory in the fight, and made thee more than conqueror over thy foes, but I am thy God and thy portion for ever. For Abram had renounced all the spoils of conquest; and had refused to be enriched by the king of Sodom. It was enough that he had done his duty towards God and man; he sought no other recompense than the favour of the Lord. And verily he has his reward; for now God assures him, "I am thy exceeding great reward." But at the words there rises up from Abram's heart, and springs forth from Abram's lips, the sad, sorrowful cry, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in mine house in mine heir." "What wilt thou give me?" cries the mourn-

ing patriarch! What want I more? What can anything thou hast in store for me profit or avail, "seeing I go childless," and my heir is no son born from my loins, but only this Eliezer of Damascus, who has the charge of my property and household? Some years had passed since God had promised Abram a seed numerous as the dust of the earth,—a seed "in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed;" and yet he was still childless. "Hope deferred was making his heart sick." Faith was beginning to fail. Patience was nearly exhausted. Each day as it dawned, each evening as it set, made it more improbable that a son should bless and gladden his heart and home in his old age. "To me thou hast given no seed." "After all, I am not to be the father of the promised Saviour. From the loins of another shall He spring; not from mine." Such was the infirmity of Abram's faith; such were the fears that shook his inmost soul. The questionings of his heart may have taken the same form as the doubts of another servant of God in after years: "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" And yet, even while unbelief and faith have a hard fight of it in his breast, mark how he opens his whole heart—lays bare his secret thoughts to God. He does not hide his feelings, or dissemble, or

keep silence. No; he boldly and without reserve confesses his doubts and fears, and "casts his cares upon God." And God meets the confidence of His servant in a manner the most gracious; "upbraids him not" for his want of faith; passes by his infirmity and unbelief; and seeks only to reassure his failing faith. "And, behold, the Word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And then, to give him a sign, to remind him that He that promises is able also to perform, He brings him forth out of his tent abroad, and says, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

What a scene this is! What solemn feelings fill Abram's bosom as God leads him forth this night, and bids him contemplate the glorious monuments of His power! Around him all is calm and still. Not a sound, not a breath.

> "Creation sleeps. 'Tis as the general pulse
> Of Life stood still, and Nature made a pause."

Above him bends heaven's brilliant arch; its azure vault spangled with ten thousand stars, and resplendent with the glorious tokens of the Creator's greatness. And there, alone with Him who "telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names,"—alone with Him who "binds the

sweet influences of the Pleiades, and can loose the bands of Orion; who bringeth forth Mazzaroth in his season, and guides Arcturus with his sons," Abram at His command lifts up his eyes to the midnight sky. "These Stars, canst thou number them? These Constellations, canst thou declare them? These multitudinous Orbs, which are thickly sown over the fields of darkness, and which lend a glory and a beauty to the night, canst thou reckon them up? So shall thy seed be." Countless as yonder countless hosts. "A great multitude, which no man can number."

Blessed night of promise, when "the Word of God," appealing to the glorious heavens as the tokens of His power and the pledge of His faithfulness, promised to Abram a numberless seed; and "Abram believing God, it was counted to him for righteousness!"

Oh, blessed night of promise! On the fulfilment of Jehovah's assurance to Abram of a seed hung not only the hope of Israel, but of the world,—hung not only Abram's hope, but *thine!* "Salvation is of the Jews." Of Israel, as "concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." Viewed in this aspect, that "night of promise" was unspeakably important to us all. With it was connected the future existence and glory of the Church of Christ. Abram, indeed, was the father after the flesh of a great and mighty nation—a nation of enlarged ter-

ritory and extensive dominion. God Himself dispossessed other races from Canaan, that "the land flowing with milk and honey," rescued out of the hands of idolaters, might be given to the people whom He had chosen. And even now, after the dispersion and punishment of Israel for the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, the chosen nation is not "made a full end of," but is beloved for the fathers' sakes, and shall again, a countless multitude, be restored to the land given to Abraham as an inheritance for ever. God shall yet "say to the North, Give up, and to the South, Keep not back, bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth." And as the command goes forth the dispersed of Israel and Judah shall "fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows;" and re-entering their own ancestral land, "shall build houses and inhabit them, and shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them." "And so all Israel shall be saved." In believing this, we follow no cunningly devised fable," for we have "the sure word of prophecy."

But may not Abram have seen further than this? May not the opened eye of faith have embraced in its vision, not only that numerous progeny which was to spring naturally through the child of promise, as yet unborn, but also that spiritual progeny which was to spring through his seed, even the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death was to give life

unto His Church? St. Paul, writing to the Gentile Church of Galatia, uses these words: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." And in another passage he says: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We may, therefore, conclude that Abram received the promise of a seed not only in a natural and temporal sense, but likewise in a spiritual and eternal sense, and that his faith had regard to "the blessed company of all faithful people,"—the whole sacramental host of God's elect.

What an object of rejoicing contemplation was here presented to "the father of the faithful," as lifting up his eyes to heaven he beheld the multitudinous stars! For what does he see in those shining hosts? An image not merely of a long line of descendants, who should occupy the fertile land of Canaan—an image not merely of an illustrious progeny of kings, and priests, and prophets, who should render their country celebrated throughout all generations, and be a blessing to the world, but a countless multitude of believing children, gathered from all climes, composed of all nations, and, like himself, all redeemed by the blood of "the Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world." What a prospect to animate his heart, to kindle his faith! How must his soul have been gladdened within him, as he saw, mirrored in the unnumbered stars,

the countless host of the elect! His faith must have overleaped the intervening ages, and rested on that day when Christ shall "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied;" and many "coming from the east and west shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" for ever. For then shall "all the children of God be gathered together in one." No longer "a little flock," the redeemed of the Lord shall make up a number which no man can number; millions and myraids, countless as the drops of dew which are born from the morning's womb, as the leaves of the summer forest, or as the grains of sand which are thickly scattered on the ocean's shore. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints." "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was as white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool; His throne was like fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him; thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him." What a brilliant retinue attends His regal state. These are they that were redeemed from amongst men. But how changed from their former condition. Truly, He has "raised up the poor out of the dust, and lifted up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them

inherit the throne of glory." Oh, what surpassing beauty is theirs as they shine in the Saviour's light, and reflect His lustre, and partake of His glory! No lines of sorrow on their brows, no traces of tears in their eyes, no shadow of trouble in their faces. "All the former things have passed away." There shall be no more death, nor sighing, nor sorrow, for there shall not be any more sin. Ah, what pen shall paint the glories of the day when the Lord shall return in triumph to this earth, which was the scene of His suffering and shame, and when, at His bright appearing, His buried saints shall rise from crowded cemetery, and from lonely glen, from solitary wilderness, and depths of unfathomed ocean! What tongue shall declare the raptures of the morning, when the living saints, translated that they shall not see death, "mortality being swallowed up of life," shall shine in the bloom of an undying youth and the lustre of an unfading beauty. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But though we cannot describe, we can believe, and believing, can "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Blessed indeed are they who are "blessed with faithful Abraham." Blessed all who are numbered amongst that spiritual seed which was given to the patriarch on that "night of promise," when God, leading him forth from his

tent, and placing him beneath the radiant heavens, thus spake in his ear, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

But we learn another truth from this "night of promise," and under the glorious arch of the midnight sky. It is this, "justification by faith alone, without works." This great doctrine, which is the very hope of the sinner, shines forth in the statement, "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." God promised, and Abraham believed. God spake, and Abraham took Him at His word. How simply the method of the sinner's justification is here declared and set forth! How clear is the testimony to the sufficiency of faith! "Abraham believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness." He believed, and was reckoned, or accounted, righteous. Faith was the instrument through which Abraham laid hold of the righteousness of God. It was not the actual cause or ground of his justification; it was merely the act by which he apprehended and appropriated the righteousness of God. "Abraham believed God," that was all; and "it was counted to him for righteousness." Into what plain and simple elements the whole method of the sinner's salvation may be resolved. Volumes have been written on the great doctrine of justification by faith. Long controversies have been waged on this momentous

subject. Theological debates have been carried on upon this, as Luther called it, "The article of a standing or a falling Church." And, alas, even the champions of truth have but too often "darkened counsel by a multitude of words." So that it has come to pass that there is no word to which more confused and erroneous ideas have been attached than this little word "faith." Many regard "faith" as something altogether strange and mystical; something quite remote from their daily experience, and having to do with what is unreal, unsubstantial, and vague. Is it not so? Though "faith" is on the lips of every one who thinks and speaks of religion, yet how few there are who can give any satisfactory definition of its nature, character, or office! And where, amid the conflict of opinions, shall we send the inquirer to learn what that principle is through which a sinner is justified? To that night-scene where, under the starry sky, Abram stood alone with God, and where, God having promised, Abram believed in His word. There were other occasions in the Patriarch's eventful life where his faith went hand in hand with obedience. "His faith wrought by works," when being "called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went." Again, "his faith wrought by works," when at the command of God he took his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he

loved, and bound him on the altar, and raised the knife that was to pierce his bosom, and drink his blood. On each of these occasions Abram had to obey as well as to believe. On neither was faith seen singly and alone without works. A doubt might, therefore, arise with some, whether Abram's acceptance with God depended on his faith; on his simply believing the testimony of the Lord. But here, in this "Night of Promise," all is made plain. No test is proposed for the trial of the Patriarch's faith. No condition is given him to fulfil. No work is placed before him to do. No suffering is set before him to be endured. He is simply required to take God at His word; to lift up his eyes to the midnight sky, inlaid with unnumbered stars, and to see in their shining hosts an image of the countless progeny that, springing from his loins, should arise and call him father. Faith, only faith, that is all that God asks, and all that Abram has to give. But he does give it, and is accepted. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

How simple, after all, is the doctrine of the sinner's justification by faith! This blessed "Night of Promise" teaches us that justifying faith consists in believing what God says, and merely because He says it—believing, in spite of everything that sense cannot reconcile, or regards as impossible; believing, irrespective of any acts of

obedience, or any good works we may be performing or bringing forth. Would to God we had all such a faith as this! O for the faith that believes all God says, and is content to believe where it is not able to comprehend! The faith that has for its object the whole revealed truth of God; a faith just as strong in the promises of the Bible as if promise had become fulfilment; this is what we need. Such a faith as this justifieth; for resting upon Christ to obtain pardon, acknowledging Him to be the only Saviour, and hanging upon Him for salvation, it accepts the righteousness of Christ, and makes us just before God. And let us remember that while saving faith has for its object every fact and doctrine revealed in the Word of God, it has for its especial object the perfect obedience and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me explain my meaning by an illustration borrowed from an old writer :—"For as the Israelites by the same eyes by which they looked upon the brazen serpent saw other things, but they were not healed by looking at anything else, but only the brazen serpent: so, though by the same faith whereby I cleave to Christ for remission of sins, I believe every truth revealed, yet I am not justified by believing any truth but the promise of grace in the Gospel." Faith is the eye which sees Christ as the only means to save. Faith is the hand which lays hold on Christ as the only means to deliver.

It ventures all on Christ; the pardon, the peace, the life, the happiness of the soul. It entrusts everything to Christ in the deep, solemn, heartfelt conviction that "He is able to keep that which is committed unto Him against that day." May God give us such a faith! For He alone is the author of this saving grace. We cannot reason ourselves into faith. We cannot work faith in ourselves. It must come from above. It is "the gift of God." Let it be sought in earnest, persevering prayer. Have we not the promise, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"? Pray for faith. Pray with the earnestness of the man of whom we read in the Gospels. The father has brought his son to Jesus that the evil spirit may be cast out. Unhappy boy! The devil taketh him and teareth him; and ofttimes casts him into the fire, and into the water, to destroy him; and he, foaming and gnashing with his teeth, pineth away. "If Thou canst do anything," prays the anxious father, "have compassion on us, and help us!" And Jesus says unto him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." And the father, with bursting heart and quivering lip and desire thrilling in every tone, "cries out, and says with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Thus earnest be your prayer for "faith;" for your happiness, your life, your salvation depend upon your having

this grace; seeing that "without faith it is impossible to please God;" and that "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." On the other hand, blessed are they who, "being justified by faith, have peace with God;" for with every sin pardoned, all guilt removed, God reconciled, and heaven opened, they are able to "rejoice in hope of the glory to be revealed."

My brother, my sister, has that hour ever come in your experience when you and God have met ALONE, no one interposing, and you have once and for ever settled the great question of your salvation? Making trial of His grace, have you brought to Him your guilt, your misery, your darkness and doubt, and confessing all, sought pardon for *His* sake who "died the just for the unjust to bring us to God"? Have you made full proof of the fact that faith is a thoroughly individual and personal transaction; that it is a direct dealing between your soul and God? For the very life of religion consists in the personal dealing of the believing sinner with the living Saviour in whom he trusts. And, oh, for ever blessed that night or day, ever to be remembered with joy, in which you brought your weary and restless soul to God, and, casting your burden on the Lord, found that He was able and willing to sustain it! Oh, night or day never to be forgotten — the beginning of all future nights and days—when, taking God simply at His word, you

ventured your soul's peace on His promises, and discovered that they could not fail you; when you heard Him for yourselves, and knew that this was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God! Believing in God, your faith was counted unto you for righteousness;" and "knowing whom you believed," you knew the blessedness of "the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose iniquity is covered."

But, oh! should you never have thus dealt with God alone, no one interposing, meeting Him face to face, let me say to you, Thus must you deal with Him; thus must you meet Him, if you would be saved. Religion is a personal matter between your soul and God. And, oh, remember the hour is coming; the day, the night, when you shall meet God alone, whether for salvation or damnation! There is a time at hand when you shall see that awful Being against whom you have sinned. Meet Him in death you must; meet Him ALONE, as if in all the universe there were no other sinner beside yourself. Shall it be thus, I pray you? Shall the night of death be the first time in which you meet with God to settle the controversy that is between you? If so, O night of horror! night of unavailing remorse, of terrible agony and everlasting despair, when your lost soul is driven away from the presence of the infinite Light into that "outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth!"

CHAPTER II.

The Night of Sacrifice.

"WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD IS NO REMISSION OF SIN."

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between the pieces."—GENESIS XV. 17.

The Night of Sacrifice.

"The Night of Promise" was followed by "a Night of Sacrifice." The stars on which "the Word of the Lord" bade Abram fasten his gaze, that he might see in their countless hosts the number of his seed, died out from the heavens. They paled their fires before the dawning of the golden morn.

The day breaks, and we find that God is still with His servant. He is about to show him further favour, to give him a clearer insight into the future. Thus Abram and the gracious Being who announces Himself as "his Shield, and his exceeding great Reward," are in close communion from night till morning, from morning till night. Well may it be said, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God." God now renews the promise of the land:

"I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." And Abram in reply humbly entreats for a pledge or token whereby he might be assured that the Word of God would be fulfilled: "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" This is not said in the spirit of doubt or unbelief. It is not the question of one who requires a sign in order to his believing. It can by no means be said of Abram, as it was of the Jews, "They asked a sign from Him, tempting Him." Far enough from this. "Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." All the Patriarch wanted was something of sight and sense as pledge and proof of God's promises. He had left the land of his fathers—had "gone out, not knowing whither he went"—was a stranger in the country where he sojourned—was old and childless—one "Eliezer of Damascus, the steward of his house," his only apparent heir; and he yearns for some visible sign as an anchor for his hope, "And he says, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" And the Lord vouchsafes a gracious answer. He makes His glory to pass before the Patriarch, and gives him in this manifestation of Himself a pledge and earnest of the inheritance which is in store for him and for his seed. He commands Abram to prepare a sacrifice; and, on the compliance of His servant, conveys to him the

assurance he desires. By the bright symbols of His divine presence, as well as by the solemn word of promise, God makes on this memorable Night of Sacrifice an irrevocable covenant with Abram. "And God said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another, but the birds divided he not." It is very observable that this sacrifice consisted of the same victims which God subsequently commanded to be used in the sacrifices of the Levitical dispensation. Must we not, therefore, believe that as "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean and sanctifying to the purifying of the flesh," were "shadows of good things to come,"— of the one great propitiation for sin,—so did this ordained and appointed oblation made by Abram shadow forth the sacrifice of Christ, "who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, that He might purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God"? The whole transaction teaches us, that from the beginning sinful man could only approach a holy God through the shedding of blood. God's covenant — the covenant "ordered in all things and sure" — is based on sacrifice. Life through another's death, salvation

by the substitution of the innocent, redemption through vicarious suffering, is the central doctrine of the Gospel. From almost its first page to its last, Scripture gives a consistent testimony to the truth that nothing saves but blood. Abel, who took of the firstlings of his flock—patriarchs, who offered slain animals on the rude altar of stone—the daily victims prescribed under the Levitical law—the bleeding lamb—the goat presented before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle—all bore solemn witness to the truth that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." No one might approach God save through the one way of His own appointing, even through the meritorious death of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." From the beginning, from the hour of the Fall down to the hour when the dead Saviour hung on the cross, all promise, type, and prophecy centred in Christ. He was the Saviour of man, and none but He. All who passed from the shadows of time into the glories of eternity passed along that "new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the vail; that is to say, His flesh." Christ is the salvation of guilty sinners on earth; Christ is the song of rejoicing saints in heaven. *There* they sing with melodious voices and in harmonious numbers before the throne the praises of that Saviour in whose merits they trusted *here*, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hath redeemed

us to God by thy blood." May we catch with the ear of faith the song of the glorified, and casting away all other hope, and simply resting on "the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," trust entirely to Him who "made His soul an offering for sin," and "died the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

We are now called to contemplate Abram when the sacrifice is prepared, and the victims are slain, and the pieces laid in order. What does God proceed to do next? Does He at once come forward, and give him the implored pledge of His favour and faithfulness in connexion with the offering of blood? No; He is pleased to make His servant wait. From morning till evening for a whole long day, Abram sits beside the sacrifice, and preserves it from the assaults of the birds of prey. "When the fowls came down upon the carcase, Abram drove them away." There, in silence and suspense, waiting on the will of God, through the glare of noon and far into the gloom of night, Abram keeps watch and ward, and drives away the ravenous birds from the animals he had slain. Solemn season of suspense, when alone, and with chastened awe and dread expectancy, he waits for a farther revelation from God! Hour after hour passes away, and there is neither voice nor vision. Quietly, patiently, hopefully, Abram waits until God shall speak again.

Children of God, this is what the Lord's people have to learn—a lesson of submissive patience. Even when all things appear ready and prepared for the answer to our prayers, God makes us wait. He puts faith and patience on their trial. He sends us no immediate answer—gives us no help—comes not to our relief. Like Abram, we have to drive away the birds from the sacrifice—evil thoughts, unbelieving suggestions, impatient murmurings from the mind. And like Abram our duty is not to move, to take no step, to remain perfectly quiet, until we hear the voice of the Lord saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." "Our strength is to sit still." A hard lesson this to learn; perhaps one of the hardest. Full of infirmity, with nature struggling against grace, anxious, restless, how prone we are to grow weary of waiting upon God, and how ready we are to cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" But let us put our trust in God, "in patience let us possess our souls," and we shall discover, even as Abram did, that "blessed are all they that wait upon the Lord."

"When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him." This "great darkness"—darkness as of the shadow of death, which shrouded the sleeping patriarch, was, no doubt, a symbol of the trials and afflictions which awaited his posterity in Egypt. It was a fitting type of the tribulation

through which the chosen people were to pass to glory. For now God lays bare to him the future of his seed. "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance." As Abram heard "the Word of the Lord" disclosing the future fortunes of his seed, we can fancy that the cold chill of disappointment must have overspread his heart. For he doubtless had hoped that the children just promised him would enter speedily on the possession of the land that had been made over to him for an inheritance. He fondly thought that their course would be one of unchequered prosperity; and now he is told that years are to elapse before either he or his seed shall have any property in the soil which the Lord, as his God, has pledged Himself to bestow. Nay, he is now made aware that exile, bondage, and oppression are to be the portion of his descendants before they are settled in the promised inheritance. For four hundred years they are to be afflicted in a strange land, and by a strange people. But hope was only to be deferred. It was not one which could eventually "make ashamed," though present delay might "make the heart sick." The same God who had in His wisdom appointed their trials, would in His mercy limit

them. The very day, the very hour was appointed in which their sorrows should cease, and their tribulation issue in glory. "Four hundred years" of trial, and then deliverance!

Here is a lesson for all the children of God, Abram's spiritual seed. "Affliction springeth not out of the ground." Your trials do not happen by accident or chance. God appoints them all, orders all their circumstances, controls all their issues. He ordains their commencement, their duration, their end. "Your times are in His hand." How exquisitely beautiful, as well as consoling, are the words of the Psalmist, "Thou givest them tears to drink in a measure;" for so ought the clause in the fifth verse of the eightieth Psalm to be rendered, not "in *great measure*," as it is translated in our version. The Hebrew word for "measure" occurs but once more in the whole Bible, in the twelfth verse of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, where it is said of God, He "hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure." And so should the word be rendered in the eightieth Psalm, "Thou givest them tears to drink in a measure." Pause upon the words, "In a measure." Hear ye this, children of sorrow; He does not permit one tear more than is needful to be wrung from your weeping eyes. The "measure" never can be said to run over; it is full, but no more. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are

dust." He weighs out our trials; mingles our cup; tempers judgment with mercy. And remember, also, to what a triumphant issue He brings the trials and troubles of His people. Crowns spring from these crosses, triumphs from these tears, glory from this humiliation. "The light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

When the Lord promises that though for a period the posterity of Abram shall be in captivity and exile, they shall eventually, "in the fourth generation," enter on the possession of the covenanted inheritance, He seems to exclude Abram himself from a participation in this hope. "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." What an apparent contradiction there is between the announcement made in this verse and the promise given to Abram but a little while before: "I am the Lord, that brought thee out of the land of the Chaldees, *to give thee this land to inherit it!*" And now God tells him that he is to die, to "enter the house appointed for all living," to "depart hence and be no more seen," before he has received any portion of the inheritance, even "so much as to set his foot on." Does then God promise and retract, say and unsay, give and withhold in one breath? Does He deny Himself? Not so. "He is not a man

that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent." "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." How, then, can the statements of the two verses be reconciled,—the one which declares, "I will give thee this land to inherit it," and the other, which announces, "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age"? By reading them in the light of St. Paul's interpretation. In the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews we find it thus written: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." In these last words we have the key to the solution of the difficulty. "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The assurance, "I will give thee this land," must have reference to "a better country, that is, an heavenly." He shall rise from the grave, to which he is to go "in a good old age," and receive from the Lord an inheritance in that new earth in which righteousness shall dwell. In the resurrection-state Abram, and "the faithful," of whom Abram is "the father," shall be

heirs of the world, partakers of the glory then fully and finally revealed. And may it not be that even on the renewed earth the Patriarch himself shall have some especial interest in the land of Canaan, which shall be occupied by his descendants in that day when the Lord shall reign with His risen saints, and "before His ancients gloriously"? Is it not thus that God speaks of the future triumph and blessedness of the chosen people, in connexion with the promised land. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." Again: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord."

But, again, from God's promise to Abram that he should inherit the land, taken in connexion with the announcement of the Patriarch's death before the promise could be fulfilled, we are taught that Abram must have looked for a life beyond death.

May it not be gathered from this and other passages of Scripture, that the Old Testament saints lived in the faith, and died in the hope, not only of the soul's immortality, but of the body's resurrection? Our Saviour's very argument with the Sadducees, when He would prove the truth of the resurrection, implies this. "But, as touching the resurrection from the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him." And what was there in the fact that God "was not the God of the dead, but of the living," to establish the truth of a resurrection? Much; very much. Everything. For, as God entered into covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob while they were in the body, so in the body must they expect and require that the covenant shall be made good. The promises which He made them, as "their God," were not made to disembodied spirits, but to living men in the flesh; and to living men in the flesh, not to disembodied spirits, are these promises to be fulfilled. The patriarchs must, therefore, have looked forward to a resurrection in order to receive the inheritance which God had prepared for their possession. Many there are who hold that the saints of the Old Testament looked only to temporal promises; that their vision

was bounded by this world. Can such an opinion be received? Not for a moment. The above argument of Christ surely proves that the light of the resurrection morning threw some of its rays upon patriarchal graves. Hope in the earliest ages kindled her torch at the heavenly altar, and the gloom that hung about the portals of the sepulchre was broken by its fires. Though "life and immortality had not been brought to light by the Gospel," there were glimpses and foreshadowings of the glory to be revealed. And Abraham, when he "buried his dead out of his sight;" and Isaac, when he reverently carried Abraham to the tomb; and Jacob, when he laid Isaac with his people, were partakers of that hope without which we were "of all men most miserable." They looked for a city reared by no human hands, whose stones should be hewn from no earthly quarry; whose lights should flow from no material sun or moon;" "a city whose builder and whose maker is God."

And so St. Paul, when speaking of the worthies of old, declares, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had

opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." Who, therefore, can entertain a doubt that the faith and hope of Abram rested on the good things he was to receive after the resurrection? or question that God intended His servant to have respect to the inheritance to be enjoyed in the life which is to come, when He said, "I will give thee this land to inherit it"?

Another observation must be made on the promise given to the Patriarch concerning his posterity. In the sixteenth verse it is written, "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Here we are given the reason for the delay in bringing the chosen people into the promised land—the long-suffering of God. "The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." Not yet was the time come for driving out the present inhabitants, and for executing judgment on their sins. Destruction is the Lord's strange work; He goes about it reluctantly and with regret. The race of the Amorites, corrupt as it is, is to be spared yet for a season. Who knows but some amongst them may repent? Most gracious God! He is in no haste to punish; nay, rather, is He "slow to anger," and "waits to be gracious." Mercy shall be extended to the uttermost. Not till the last drop of wickedness is poured into the cup,

not till their iniquity is full, shall vengeance overtake the Amorites. And if God be unwilling to "execute judgment speedily against the workers of iniquity," Abram and his descendants need not be in haste, as though the Lord were delaying His interposition too long, and four hundred years were too protracted a period to wait for the promised inheritance. The fierceness of the Lord's anger shall be soon enough outpoured on the unrighteous nation.

Is there not something here that reminds us of the relation between the Church and the world, and teaches us that God's forbearance toward the latter is the reason of His delay in ushering in the triumphs of the former? When wickedness triumphs, and godless violence makes the earth to groan and bleed, and the righteous are oppressed, the people of God are tempted to re-echo the cry of the souls under the altar, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" When the ear is pained by tales of misery, and outrage, and intolerance, the question springs from our lips, "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?" When the soul is cast down by the ever-sounding wail of sin and suffering and sorrow, of "mourning and lamentation and woe," we impatiently exclaim, "Arise, and let thine enemies

perish; let the righteous be glad and exceedingly rejoice." But the Lord is more merciful than man. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" and the Christian may well be "patient, too, unto the coming of the Lord." It is speeding on, the day of retribution. Who can doubt that "God will avenge His own elect?" yea, and "avenge them speedily?" Believers need not be in haste, as though "the great day of His wrath were too long delayed; it will come in due season; AND WHEN IT DOES COME, Woe, Woe unto them who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!" In the mean time, let us use the brief day of grace in gathering into the fold the Lord's sheep; in saving the elect remnant; for now is our time for being fellow-labourers with God; now while He is "waiting to be gracious;" now while the iniquity of the unrighteous and ungodly is not yet full."

There is only one other circumstance to be noted in this "Night of Sacrifice." "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." "The smoking furnace and the burning lamp," which passed between the divided limbs of the slaughtered victims, were the visible symbols of the Divine Presence; the

glorious pledges that the appointed sacrifice was accepted, and the covenant confirmed. There is an allusion to the custom of thus making a covenant by sacrifice, and to the passing of the parties in the covenant between the limbs of the animals which had been slain and divided, in the 34th chapter and 18th verse of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah :—"I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life." In the instance which we are considering, "The Word of the Lord" graciously condescends to adopt the same method of confirming His covenant with Abram, and He displays His glory in connection with the shedding of blood, and the offering of a sacrifice for sin. The darkness of the night is illumined by "a smoking furnace" and "a lamp of fire," which pass between the divided pieces. What do we learn from these burning symbols of the Divine Presence as they light up the darkness, and consuming the sacrifice, prove its acceptance, and seal the solemn ratification of the covenant? This great truth—God displays His glory in all its fulness and brightness only in connexion with sacrifice. Had there been no atoning sacrifice; had the Cross never been erected on Cal-

vary, God would have been to us what He was to the Athenians of old, "the unknown God." Christ crucified is God glorified. Had we the whole universe at our command, to search, and examine, and scan, where should we go to obtain the clearest view of the attributes of the infinite and eternal God? Should we "take the wings of the morning," and soar upwards to the vast fields of immensity, where suns, and stars, and planets that now people a once empty space, reveal the wisdom and power and goodness of Him who "spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast"? Not so. The works of nature give us no clear response when we ask of them the character of God. The oracle is dumb. What did the wisest of heathen sages discover of God from the heavens in their brightness? Nature offered the ancient philosopher her Lamp, that by its light he might read the universe, and discover from it the perfections of the Deity. And what, after all his researches into the character of God as lettered on the firmament, or syllabled by the works of nature, did he bring back? Something; but not much. He was able to discover an evidence of the wisdom and the power of the Deity who could summon all these worlds into existence, and a testimony to the goodness and beneficence of a Being who "left not himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts

with food and gladness." But this was all. The heathen philosopher could not discover that God was a being of infinite love and holiness, of unbending justice and truth. Nature was able to furnish only a contradictory testimony to the character of Him "who giveth to all life and breath, and all things." If there were the sunshine, and the shower, and the breeze; if there were health and strength, and family joys, and domestic endearments, there were also the storm and the hurricane, and the earthquake, and disease and death, and opened graves, and bitter bereavements. How reconcile these discordant evidences to the character of God? There was no means of doing so without the Lamp of revelation; and had not we this divinely-kindled Light we should be in as utter darkness as that which overspread the heathen mind. We must turn, then, from the firmament spangled with stars, and crowded with suns, and look elsewhere for a manifestation of the perfection of God. And strange though it may sound, yet true it is that not heaven itself gave such a testimony to the character of God as this earth; that His glory was not so clearly manifested in the world where the Angels sing His praise, and the Seraphim veil their faces before His ineffable splendour, as upon this sin-clouded planet labouring under a curse. The incarnation of the only begotten Son was a new revelation even to the Heavenly Host of the character of God; a revelation

that so surpassed all they had hitherto known or imagined of Jehovah's perfections, that they sang with a new meaning on the night in which the Saviour was born, words which they had often used before, crying one to another, "Glory to God in the highest!" And this is what St. Paul declares when he says, that "The mystery, which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God," was at length proclaimed to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church"—in other words, through the instrumentality of redeemed man—the "manifold wisdom of God." And if it be asked, where can we best attain to the realization of the desire of Moses when he said to God, "I pray thee show me thy glory"? the answer is ready. "At Calvary." In the Cross we behold all the attributes of the Godhead illustrated, magnified, and made honourable. Let us gaze on the eternal Son bending beneath the crushing burden of the world's iniquities—"Dying, the just for the unjust, to bring us nigh unto God." Angels, too, have looked on that mysterious tree and bleeding victim, and have seen in that sacred and solemn spectacle, more of the Holiness and Wisdom, the Love, and the Justice of God, than in the whole range of the universe beside. There they first saw Mercy—Mercy, an attribute hidden in the deep bosom of the Godhead,—an attribute abso-

lutely unknown, because having no scope for its exercise, until it was manifested in redemption, and seen extending compassion to the unworthy, and pardon to the guilty. In the oblation of Christ, where "Mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other," where God appears "just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly," all the perfections of Jehovah are pre-eminently conspicuous, and shine forth as brightly as that "burning lamp of fire" which passed between the "divided pieces" of Abram's sacrifice. And, oh, since this is so, should we not make the Apostle's determination our own, and say, "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!"

For the Cross is the Sun of the spiritual universe, from which all our blessings radiate. The Cross is the Tree of Life to the world, and on it grow those leaves which are for the healing of the nations." With the Cross are intertwined all our hopes; from it flow the mercies of the present, the joys of the future; the grace that sanctifies the sinner on earth; the glory that will crown the saint in heaven. Is this indeed the case? Does the atonement which satisfied all the attributes of God, meet all the necessities of man. If so, what can any sinner, even the chiefest, need more? Nothing; absolutely nothing; every claim has been met, every demand

satisfied, by the death upon the Cross. The everlasting covenant has been sealed and ratified by blood, the precious blood of Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." If we lose sight of the Saviour's finished work, we have nothing to trust to: our hope must be unsettled, and our faith without an object on which to rest. Our peace depends on our believing that Jesus finished the work which, as the Head of His Church, He came from heaven to accomplish; that in the salvation of His chosen people He fully carried out what was the purpose of His Father from the beginning. Casting our sins upon Him, under this blessed belief, we shall be able to go on our way rejoicing, feeling assured that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And if Christ bowed the heavens to the Cross for us men and for our salvation, then with what force, yea with what solemnity, comes the question, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" We cannot escape. There is no other way but this, the death of the Son of God, by which we can possibly be saved. Reject this, and "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose

ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" "Of how much more sorer punishment!" Awful words! How plainly and how fearfully they declare that there is no hope for any one who rejects the sacrifice of Christ! Truly, "our God is a consuming fire." "A fire" He is; "a fire" He must prove Himself to every impenitent sinner. Oh, make a covenant with Him through the sacrifice of His Son, and then, Blessed be His holy name, you will discover that the fire of His righteous anger has been once and for ever quenched in the precious blood of the atoning Lamb. Flee to the fountain which has been opened for sin and uncleanness. If you continue at enmity with God, He must be to you "a fire," "a consuming fire;" "a fire" consuming, but not destroying,—the undying soul being the fuel on which it shall everlastingly feed.

CHAPTER III.

The Night of Escape.

"AND IF THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY BE SAVED, WHERE SHALL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?"

"And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground."—GENESIS XIX. 1.

The Night of Escape.

And how came it to pass that "the righteous Lot" was found an inhabitant of the wicked Sodom? What brought him to a place of such "exceeding sinfulness?" The same thing which often proves a snare and sad temptation to many a righteous man in the present day—a love for the good things of this world. When Lot returned with Abram from Egypt to Palestine their wealth was so abundant, their substance consisting chiefly in flocks and herds, that they found themselves straitened for room in the land. A strife arose between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle; and before the misunderstanding of the servants extended to their masters, the uncle and nephew agreed to end the contention by an amicable separation. Abram, walking by faith, and not anxious about an earthly portion, is not careful to choose for himself one part of the land above another, but rather is ready to give the preference to Lot. Lot,

on the contrary, judging by sight and sense, and acting under the influence of worldly motives, is attracted by the fertility and beauty of the well-watered plain of Jordan. Its fruitful gardens, the green pastures, the harvest fields which clothe the river's banks, have charms for his longing eyes. His choice is at once made. He lays no stress on the fact that the people amongst whom he is to dwell "are wicked before the Lord, and sinners exceedingly." He judges according to this world's judgment, and narrowly escapes the world's doom. And did he not suffer in respect of personal religion from his contact with the ungodly? Alas! his sad and shameful fall, when he found a refuge in the mountains with his daughters, has transmitted his dishonoured name as a beacon and a byword to all succeeding generations. "Who can touch pitch, and not be defiled?"

We may pause here to ask, Are any of us, who are the professed servants of Christ, mingling familiarly from interested motives with the world, and thinking that we may escape the world's pollution? Who can take fire into his bosom, and not be burned? With respect to the world's companies, and pleasures, and maxims,—its questionable principles, its doubtful morality,—we shall do well to make this our rule of life,—"touch not, taste not, handle not." And in order to do this, it is not necessary that we should flee out of the world; that

we should leave family and friends, and that station in life to which it has pleased God to call us. It is only Popish art and craft that would persuade men to abandon the sphere of social and relative duties, and to seek shelter within the cloister's or the convent's walls. How different from the Saviour's will concerning His disciples: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." This was His prayer for them. It is the part of the coward to fly; it is the part of the brave soldier to stand and fight. But fight he must; and enter into no alliance with the enemy, and make no concession to the foe. Like the stern call of a battle-cry should the words ring in our ears: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith; quit you like men, be strong." And let us remember that the world is an enemy which assumes many shapes, and takes divers forms. It is a hundred-headed Hydra. Most of all is it to be dreaded when it comes with a smiling face, and a hand filled with gifts. Its blandishments are more to be feared than its blows; its favours than its frowns. Many a man who would have defied the persecutions of the world, has fallen before its allurements. Here let us remember Samson. He who singly did not quail before a hundred bearded men clothed in steel; he who, with the jaw-bone of an ass, slew a thousand, and laid them "heaps upon heaps," was vanquished by the charms

of Delilah, and lay in her lap, shorn of all his strength. A woman, bland, beautiful, and smiling, was his deadliest foe. So with the world. It is most dangerous when it meets us, not as the roaring lion which threatens to devour, but as the creeping serpent which glides into the bosom it intends to sting, and fascinates in order that it may kill.

Very true, a certain intercourse between the followers of Christ and the men of the world is inevitable; such as fellowship in the domestic relations; in the charities of social life; in the traffic of the market-place, and in the negotiations of the exchange. Nay, with certain restrictions, and for certain ends, such fellowship is desirable, for "the righteous are the salt of the earth;" and for the very purpose of seasoning the corrupt mass it is necessary they should mix and mingle with it. But let them take care that they do season it, and that they do not lose their own "savour" by the contact. And wise will they be in their generation, if they shun as much as possible the company of those whose false principles, or whose evil practices have a tendency to diminish their zeal for truth, and their hatred for sin; or in any way to hinder them from living to God's glory, and for man's good. In the choice of their associates, let them not be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers." There is no truth more important to be acted upon than this, and especially by

those just entering upon life: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." It is the Christian's bounden duty to avoid and abjure every place, pleasure, and pursuit which has a tendency to blemish his profession; to obscure the lustre of his graces, or grieve "the Holy Spirit of God." "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" Remember Lot. From motives of carnal policy he took up his abode amongst the wicked; made alliances with them by marriage; as was natural, suffered from the contact; and, though he was finally delivered, yet was he almost lost — was only "snatched as a brand from the burning"— was "saved," yet literally "so as by fire."

It is to be remarked, however, that amidst the unparalleled iniquity of Sodom, Lot had no sympathy with the abominable practices of the wicked. Familiarity with their vices had not blunted the fine-set edge of conscience. Hence, under God, he escaped the contamination, and "kept himself unspotted from the world." So at least we learn from the statement of the Apostle Peter: "He was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." His spirit

was burdened, oppressed, borne down, when he saw the men of the city fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, "living without God, and without hope in the world." His was not that specious, spurious charity which can excuse or palliate sin, or regard with calm indifference, or lenient indulgence, the false opinions and the sinful habits which prevail in the world, and which are the devil's devices to deceive and destroy the soul. No, no! He had not learned to call sins by smooth names; to gloss over the evil, or to think lightly of transgression. "His righteous soul" was wearied, and worn out "by the filthy conversation of the wicked."

How is it with you, my brother? Do you "vex yourself" because of the unlawful deeds that are done and sanctioned around you? Are you moved to a holy indignation because of the spectacle of impiety, and ungodliness, and infidelity? Is your deepest grief and trouble and compassion excited because men keep not God's law? Have you the same solicitude for transgressors as he had, who, quite unmanned by his sorrow, was ready to play the woman with his eyes, and exclaimed, "If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride?" Or as he had, who, with a pen dipped in burning tears, wrote these words: "Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ"? Know you anything of the mind

of Him who, "when He came near the city, wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes"? Or do you "care for none of these things?" Wrapped up in self, do the sins of others cause you no sorrow, or grief, or disquietude of heart? If so, be assured that such indifference is no healthy sign; rather is it a proof that you have never yet been awakened to the worth of your own soul, or to the value of that Saviour who alone can save you from your sins. Even Lot, worldly, inconsistent as he was, had so great a concern for the honour of God, so poignant a sorrow for the wickedness of men, so deep a compassion for their coming doom, that he "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with the filthy conversation of the wicked."

Let us observe the manner in which Lot was occupied on the eve of this night, this terrible night, in which Sodom was destroyed. "At even Lot sat in the gate of the city." What doeth he here? "The drunkards," it is said, "sit in the gate." Is he as one of them? Why, when the shadows of evening are closing in, has this holy man taken up his post in a place so public? The other inhabitants of Sodom have either retired to rest, or are now spending the hours in godless riot and debauchery. And yet here is Lot sitting alone

at the entrance of the city. Wherefore? May it not be that this righteous man is on the look-out for any travellers who, on their way at nightfall through the city, may require the shelter of a friendly roof, and need protection from the snares of the wicked? The ravening wolf will shortly be abroad, and that the unsuspecting lamb may not fall into the hands of the lawless and profane, Lot will open his own doors, and constrain the passing stranger to be his guest. So, "entertaining strangers, he entertains angels unawares." His pious consideration and charity are well rewarded.

Two angels come to Sodom at even. He invites them to his home. They at first decline the offer; but, on being constrained, enter his house, where he makes them a feast, and they sit down together at the family board. A little season is spent in quiet and blessed fellowship. In holy communion they forget for a time the wild debauchery, and revelry, and sin that is turning the other houses of the city into a hell. But Lot soon discovers that it is not without personal risk that he exercises this godly hospitality; for the men of Sodom, both old and young, enraged that "this righteous man" should interfere between them and their passions and their pleasures, compass the house, and almost triumph in their assault. "But the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." "He

is mindful of His own." Lot is rescued. The people are smitten with blindness, and "groping in the darkness, they weary themselves for nought."

And now the end of the wicked approaches. The night is far spent; the day of judgment is speeding on. But for Lot's sake the Lord would fain spare and deliver those connected by strong natural ties with His servant. For God is very pitiful and very patient. "He is not willing that any should perish." "The men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord: and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." To these men, that "walked by sight and not by faith," Lot seemed as one beside himself. Everything around, above, below, contradicted his prophet-cry of judgment. There was no sign of the threatened destruction in the heavens or in the earth. The stars shone with their clear and calm radiance, as they had done from the creation of the world. The only sounds that broke upon the

stillness of the night were sounds of mirth and merriment, the gay laugh and the light jest, or the strains of viol, and tabret, and harp, which were charming the ears of the revellers with their music. "All things continue as they were;" so say the scoffers. And Lot now begins to reap the bitter fruits of his sin in having formed alliances and made inter-marriages with the ungodly. His own relatives and friends, the men wedded to his daughters, mock at his warning cry of "Woe!" and will not believe his report. They jeer at his anxiety, and laugh his earnestness to scorn.

Well, how is it with us? Are we at this moment encouraging or promoting an alliance or attachment, either for ourselves or for our children, that is unsanctified by holy principle or heavenly hope? Is there a tie being created between us and some one whom we love — a tie entirely independent of the claims of God and of Christ, and entered upon solely for this world, without any reference to the next? If so, let us pause and take heed. In the very attachments we are now forming, in the very associations that we sanction, in the very companionship we are now seeking for ourselves or our children, we may be but "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." The time may be fast coming when our folly shall be but too clear; when bitter, almost beyond endurance, shall be the idea

that we encouraged a spirit of worldliness in those whom we might and should have influenced to come out and be separate from all that could retard their advance to heaven. Can anything be more sad, more solemn to think of than this, that by precept or example we may do a wrong to others which, with all our efforts and endeavours, we shall never be able to undo? For when we shall awake to the evil influence which we have exercised over others, and begin then earnestly to endeavour to counteract it, we shall discover that it is all too late to retrace our steps—too late to retrieve the past. Terrible retribution! How shall we reap what we have sown, when, alive to the peril of those whom we love, and might once have influenced aright, we press upon them, even weeping, "the one thing needful," and only discover that the conscience is no longer tender, the mind is no longer open; and that as Lot did to his sons-in-law, we only "seem unto them as those who mock!"

The circumstances of Lot's escape from the doomed Sodom must next be observed. There is need of a command loud and startling, of a constraining violence, a powerful hand to deliver even "the righteous man" from the destruction that overtook the wicked. "When the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the

city. And, while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." See "the deceitfulness of sin." Even with the signs of the coming judgment thickening around him, with the shrill and startling cry still echoing in his ears, "The Lord hath sent us to destroy the city!" "Lot lingers." The world has still power over his heart, and "he lingers." He is loth to leave the place where are his goods, and his substance, and the possessions for which he was induced to take up his abode amongst the wicked. For he loses all in the destruction of Sodom. The flocks and herds, and much cattle, and the well-watered plains of Jordan, which induced him to settle in that spot, are all to be overwhelmed in the same fiery ruin, when the Lord shall "rain brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." So Lot, unwilling to abandon his all,—his friends, moreover, and acquaintances, "lingers."

Alas! is not Lot, in the act of lingering, but the type of many a Christian? How reluctant are we to withdraw entirely from an evil and doomed

world! What "halting between two opinions." What endeavours to "serve God and Mammon." How many are ready to go a certain length in religion, and there and then to stop. Can it be doubted that a want of decision for God is the sad characteristic of too many of those "who profess and call themselves Christians"? "They are neither hot nor cold." On God's side, when religion demands no sacrifice — calls to no self-denial. On the world's side, when pleasure, or ease, or self-indulgence puts in its claims for gratification. And therefore it is that there is no "growth in grace;" no advance in the Divine life; no peace, or satisfaction, or enjoyment in the things of God. How *can* there be, when the *whole* heart is not given up to God, and "His kingdom and its righteousness" is not the *first thing* sought? And what must be felt most strongly about those who are undecided, and allow themselves to be entangled in this world's friendships, is this, that if a time of testing and sifting were to come and to try their principles, they would be found altogether wanting, or else, if saved, saved, like Lot, "yet so as by fire."

Oh, are any of us lingering, loitering, wavering, undecided? Have we not yet made our "calling and election sure?" Has "the good part" been chosen, and the city of iniquity been abandoned? Who is there that is dreaming that all is safe and

well, crying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace"? Would to God he might be awakened by the sharp and shrill and startling cry, "Escape for thy life." Your case demands plain, prompt, and faithful treatment. "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." "Forgetting the things which are behind, reach forth unto those things that are before;" for "no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." With so much at stake; with life or death, heaven or hell, blessing or cursing, hanging upon the issue, who will dare to draw back, or venture to "linger in the plain"? Know we not that one, who should have shared her husband's flight to the last, cleaved in heart to her old home, and, "looking back from behind him, became a pillar of salt"? And oh, if the call to the professing Christian be so startling, that to the unrighteous is equally shrill; and the question ought to come with thrilling force and power to the consciences of all, "If the righteous," such as righteous Lot, "scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

It must be noticed that Lot's deliverance was connected with Abraham's intercession. It is said that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." The prayer of Abraham was not forgotten. The one righteous man was not destroyed with the multitude of the ungodly. When Sodom

perished, Lot was rescued from the flames. We have here a practical example of the power of intercessory prayer. We here are made to see how a good man may be a channel of blessing to his children, his friends, his relatives; how he may stand between them and the displeasure of God; how he may ward off judgments from their head.

Prayer, intercessory prayer, who may declare its power? What blessings has it not called down from heaven, what evils has it not averted from the head of others? It has thrown a shield over the weak; covered the head in the day of battle; thrown open the gates of the prison; and brought health and healing into the veins of the dying and the diseased. What turned aside the scythe of death from the nobleman's son who lay sick at Capernaum? The father's prayer. What cast out the devil from the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, and restored her to her proper self? The mother's supplication. And when the vessel has been tossed on the tempestuous deep, what amidst the roar of the elements has hushed the fury of the winds, and calmed the anger of the waves, and sped the ship in safety on her onward course? The prayer of the mother as she has knelt for her sailor-boy, and cried unto Him who was able to overrule the elemental strife, and to say unto the winds and the waves, "Peace; be still." And what amid greater dangers than those of the stormy ocean—the temptations of a great city—has

kept her son pure, has nerved him to defy the seductions of sin, has held him in a virtuous career, and prevented his "making shipwreck of the faith"? A mother's prayers, as she has committed her boy to the keeping of an all-present God. Oh, if we wanted any encouragement to intercessory prayer, we have that encouragement in the beautiful statement, "When God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow."

Mark, again, the wondrous words of God to Lot, when Lot, being brought out of the city, prays to be allowed to take refuge in Zoar: "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." "I cannot smite till thou be in safety." "The bolt cannot descend till thou art gone from hence." "The sentence impending over the ungodly is delayed until thou art delivered." "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." When thou art escaped—THEN! Now these words unfold to us the reason of God's patience towards that "world" which "lieth in wickedness." He forbears to execute the threatened vengeance, because of His own chosen people. The righteous are "the salt of the world," seasoning the corrupt mass. They stand between the wicked and their doom. For His elect's sake, that cry unto Him day and night, the hand uplifted to strike does not fall. The judgment is suspended. The sickle cannot be thrust in to cut down

the tares till the wheat is ripe and ready for the harvest. "He cannot do anything" until the number of His Chosen be accomplished; until, the last being gathered in, they are caught up out of the world to meet Him in the air—and THEN! What is this but a virtual declaration that the world is only held in existence for the sake of that Church of which Christ is the head? All Providence is subservient to its interests. So is the whole course of nature. Seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, do not cease, simply because the Body of Christ is not yet perfected, nor the Spiritual Temple complete. But when the "Mystery of Redemption" in the final salvation of the Church is finished, then shall the angel, standing upon the sea and upon the earth, lift up his hand to heaven, and "swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that there shall be time no longer."

"The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar." Then came the judgment. The firmament above glowed with flame; the fire-shower descended; wrath came upon the ungodly to the uttermost; there was sudden and inevitable destruction; and when Abraham "looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, he beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." The lofty towers of Sodom, its noble temples and splendid palaces, the fertile fields, the smiling

pastures, the green valleys, the well-watered plains, were as one vast furnace. And the sinners—the gay, the dissolute—the thoughtless sinners who, but yester-eve, were full of life, joining in the song and the dance, and sitting at the feast — where were they? Their bodies, overwhelmed in that fiery ruin, their souls, "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

That scene of Sodom's destruction will have its antitype at the close of the present dispensation. "As it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be also in that day when the Son of man shall be revealed." Up to the very moment of the judgment all things will continue as they were. There will be no token in heaven or earth of the coming storm. The sun will shine as brightly as ever. Men will be in their usual haunts. Pleasure and business will be engrossing the minds of the multitude. The sounds of laughter and merriment will rise as usual on the air. The general cry of peace and safety shall be heard; and they who would fain save the wicked from the coming wrath will be regarded as men who "mock." And then, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, "sudden destruction shall come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." "The

Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." "Upon the wicked God shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup." And they shall not escape. No! They shall not escape. Not though "they say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But in this hour of all that is terrible and appalling, the Lord shall "be mindful of His own." "He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation," or trial, as well as "how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." His own people, washed in His blood, and justified by His righteousness, "shall be caught up to meet Him in the air;" and afar off—from that place of safety —shall only "see with their eyes the reward of the wicked." And when the judgment is completed, "behold, New Heavens and a New Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and wherein 'the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'"

CHAPTER IV.

The Night of Vision.

"THERE IS ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN,
THE MAN CHRIST JESUS."

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."—GENESIS XXVIII. 12.

The Night of Vision.

Jacob is on his flight from home. He had deceived an aged father, and defrauded a trusting brother. Dreading Esau's anger, he by his mother's advice hastens to seek an asylum with his uncle Laban in Padan-aram. As he journeys, the Wanderer lights on a certain spot, where he resolves to tarry all night, because the sun is set; and "taking of the stones of the place, and putting them for his pillow, he lies down on the ground to sleep." He has sinned, and he is beginning to suffer. A fugitive from home, he has nowhere to lay his head. Years of long exile and hard service are before him. But now when he may be tempted to think that "all things are against him," and that "God has forgotten to be gracious," the Lord is graciously pleased to cheer his heart, and to strengthen his hopes by a heavenly vision. He gives him, in a dream, an encouraging manifestation of His pardoning love and His providential care. Jacob,

wrapt in happy slumber, sees a ladder set up on the earth whose top reaches to heaven, while up and down it pass and repass the bright and beautiful angels of God. Above the ladder, the Lord God appears standing, and He addresses Jacob in most tender and animating words. He assures the Wanderer that though he is now an exile and a fugitive, solitary and forlorn, and journeying to a land of strangers, He will take him under His protection, and will "never leave him or forsake him." Awaking from his dream, Jacob is impressed with an awful conviction of the presence and nearness of the Invisible God. He exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." And he was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." "Then Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put up for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel," that is, "The House of God."

Such is Jacob's dream on "this Night of Vision." We may learn from it many instructive truths. Let us now, with the Divine blessing, search into these.

"The ladder," whose base was upon the earth, whose top was lost amid the glories of heaven, and whose shining stairs were traversed by the angels,

what are we to say of this? Our Saviour supplies us with a key to the correct interpretation. Conversing with Nathaniel, He makes use of language which evidently has a reference to Jacob's dream. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This promise may have a prospective bearing, and may point to that future time of millennial glory, —the bridal of the earth and sky,—when there shall be the closest and most unbroken communion between the new heavens and this regenerated world; "when the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." But our Saviour's words may also be regarded as having a present bearing on the complete restoration of man to the favour of God through His mediatorial work. "For it pleased the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." There was need of a reconciliation between God and man; for whatever of friendly intercourse existed at first between the Creator and the creature was interrupted by the Fall. When Adam sinned, God was so offended that He withdrew from the garden

which He had planted eastward in Eden. He came there no more as He used to do. He ceased to visit Paradise. That fair and happy spot to which He was wont to resort in the cool of the day, that He might hold intercourse with the two noble and beautiful creatures He had made in His own image, after His own likeness, became a sad and deserted place, and God abandoned this former scene of blessed and endearing communion, nor ever again, but once, and that for judgment, entered its pleasant bowers. A wide gulf of separation was opened up between heaven and earth. And how was this gulf of separation to be spanned? How was the sinner to be restored to the favour of God? How should man be just with God? It is an important question. None more so; nay, none so much so. I look up to the over-arching sky: I am told that beyond those airy clouds which fleck the firmament, beyond those stars which are so immeasurably distant from this planet, there is a city "whose foundations are garnished with all manner of precious stones:" "whose inhabitants need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." I am told that through its gates of pearl has passed "a great multitude, which no man can number;" and they have crowns upon their heads, and palms in their hands; and are robed in garments of white. Over its radiant portals are written the words, "There

shall in nowise enter anything that defileth." Oh, how then shall I, a being of sin and guilt, obtain admission there, and join that blissful throng? This is what I long to know: this is what I, a dying yet immortal being, cannot rest satisfied without knowing. And I am not left in darkness upon the point. In His abundant mercy God Himself has told me how I may be saved; how I may reach the new Jerusalem, and enter into glory. Nay, He Himself is my Saviour. The only-begotten Son, assuming the office of a daysman or mediator, has, by His obedience unto death, reopened a pathway of intercourse between the sinful and their God; and in virtue of His atoning sacrifice has become the channel of every blessing which God can bestow or that man can desire. "Through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." He is "the Way" to the Holy of Holies. He is "the Door" into the green pastures of Paradise. He is "the Gate" into the glorious kingdom of God. Jesus is, indeed, the true "Ladder:" "the new and living way" by which the sinner can rise from the guilt and condemnation of his lost condition, and mount upward to God, and taste all the unsearchable riches of His pardoning love. A highway has been thrown up in the righteousness and death of the man Christ Jesus, and passing along this, "the weary and the heavy laden" may reach the heaven above;

for whosoever cometh unto the Father through the Son shall be given an entrance into those happy mansions whence sin and sorrow are banished evermore. A blessed truth! Oh, a most blessed truth, that "the kingdom of heaven has been opened to all believers!" Is any one asking the way to heaven, and saying, "What must I do to be saved?" Come away to Jesus; His merits, His atonement, present you with "a ladder," by means of which you may climb upwards, and may take possession of the celestial city. Come; "yet there is room." The door stands open day and night, and every man that is willing may enter in and be saved, and find a glad welcome, and range at large through the green pastures, and repose at will by the calm, clear waters of the Paradise of God.

But if the ladder which Jacob beheld in his glorious vision be an appropriate emblem of Christ's mediatorial work, it is also a most striking image of the mysteries of Christ's complex Person. As the ladder, though set up on the earth, reached unto the skies, so Christ, while He was "found in fashion as a man," was at the same time the infinite and everlasting God. "The Word became flesh, was born of a pure virgin, and dwelt among us." God became human, taking upon Him the nature of men. Even when on earth as man, Christ spoke of Himself as being in heaven with God. "No

man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven." God and man in one Christ, has spanned the gulf between the upper and the lower worlds, and has opened up a channel from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven, by which not only can good angels come down on their ministries of love, but through which the sinful can rise up to those holy realms where "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." For, ever blessed be our God, Jacob's vision has for us become a waking reality. That which he beheld in a dream we can see with the eye of faith. In Christ we possess a "ladder," the base of which is set up on the earth, the top of which reaches to the heavens; for Christ was dust and Deity in one Person. And, lo! so completely are the earthly and the heavenly world united, that by the ascending steps of this ladder we have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Another thought is suggested by the imagery of the text. Religion is a work of progress. A ladder has various steps, which we must gradually ascend. Does not this illustrate the experience of the believer as he mounts on his way to heaven? Not only must the foot be planted on the ladder firmly and the hand grasp it steadily, but there must be ever an advance onward, and upward, and heaven-

ward. Nor does this truth interfere with a stanch and thankful belief in the fulness and freeness of salvation. We must accept still in its very largest sense the statement of the Apostle, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Most true it is that God could in a day, an hour, a moment, perfect all that concerneth the believer. You may have heard the story related of an old Covenanting minister. When after the duties of the day he returned home at nightfall to his wife, he told her he had just seen the most extraordinary sight it had ever been his lot to witness. He had been summoned to the death-bed of an ungodly woman, and standing over her with the message of peace on his lips, he left her not till her spirit had passed from the body. "He had found her," he said, "in a state of nature; he saw her in a state of grace; he left her in a state of glory." Though her lamp was lighted late, the Lord had let her in to the Marriage Feast.

So was it with the penitent thief. When he was nailed to the cross there was no reviler or blasphemer more profane or injurious, and yet before the sun had set he was a crowned saint in heaven. But these are exceptional cases. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." "Salvation must be worked out with fear and trembling," and will be so; "for God worketh in us both to will and to do of His own

good pleasure." There is an impossibility of our reaching the Celestial City except through Christ, and an equal impossibility of our reaching it without "striving to enter in at the strait gate, and walking along the narrow way." "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." These words illustrate our subject. They place before us the picture of a city to which an army is laying siege. A ladder has been placed against a bastion or tower. That man who, with an upward eye, and steady foot, and firm hand, is climbing his way aloft, could not mount to the top without the ladder, and the ladder would not bring him to the top unless he used efforts of his own. So while you cannot take a step in scaling the heavens without first laying hold of Christ, and clinging to Christ, and trusting to Christ, yet must "ye give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." The ascent is one of self-denial—of mortified lusts and subjugated affections. No round of the ladder is to be surmounted but by faith and obedience; and each round is so narrow that it will not admit of your encumbering yourself with any "weight or any besetting sin." And remember also yet further, that there must be no turning to the right hand or to the left. Swerve aside, and you will lose your footing; look back, and you must fall. Our only safety is in fixing the eye steadily on heaven. The Christian is to "go

from strength to strength," until he appear perfect before God in Zion. His "path is to be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." He is "to forget the things which are behind, and to reach forth unto those things which are before, and to press towards the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It were a want of faithfulness to the subject — it were a want of faithfulness to our Master—it were a want of faithfulness to our own souls, did we not keep in mind, that advancement in the Divine life is as necessary to the believer as conversion is necessary to the unbeliever. As development is the law of all life, so is it a law of the Christian's life. Like the infant which grows into boyhood, and from boyhood into manhood, so the babe in Christ matures into the man in Christ, and gradually increases and develops in grace until he "attains the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ." Oh, may it be so with us! We shall need strength for this, but we know where to apply for it. "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in your weakness," says God. May we find it so! May our course be one of progress — daily progress; may we ever be growing liker to Him "who did no sin, and in whose mouth was found no guile," and "whose meat and drink it was to do His Father's will!" Thus shall we be getting nearer

to that heaven where we shall "see Him face to face," and where, seeing Him, we shall "be like Him;" that heaven, where no temptation shall ever come, and where no enemy shall ever intrude.

"He awaked out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." He had a clear conviction that God had been with him in a very peculiar manner. He realised as he had never done before the presence of that Almighty Being who "inhabiteth eternity," who filleth all in all, "and whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

Have not we, like Jacob, often lain down and risen up, gone out and come in, without any realising sense of the all-pervading presence of Him who "is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways"? Did we enter into the truth of God's omnipresence as we ought, we should not forget Him as we now do; we should go nowhere, where going we could offend Him; we should ever keep in mind that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being," and that "He is not very far from any one of us." Oh! with this truth ever before us, we should prosecute every duty with more earnestness, and put away every temptation with more readiness, and pass through every scene in life with more purity and simplicity. How solemn the thought that God is ever at our side; that we can never for a single moment detach our-

selves from contact with Him; that, travel where we will, and wander where we will, God is equally at the spot which we leave and the spot we reach! "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

What was it kept Moses faithful amid the temptations of a palace, and nerved him to scorn "the pleasures of sin," and to despise all the treasures of Egypt? "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." Like David, he "set the Lord always before him." May we do the same! God's omnipresence!—surely a due appreciation of this truth would make us more "circumspect," more earnest, more desirous of "ordering our conversation aright," more intent upon "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." "Thou, O God, art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways." What an incentive to good! what a check upon evil! Oh, would to God that, wherever we were—in the crowd or in the closet, in public or in private—we might never forget, we might always strive to remember the great, the solemn truth, "Surely the Lord is in this place"!

"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." He felt that

though the vision was of a gladdening and gracious character, the presence of God was awful: an emotion of reverential fear thrilled through his soul. It was the same with Moses: when he beheld the bush that burned and was not consumed, he "hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." And the same with Isaiah: when he saw "the Lord on His throne, high and lifted up," the prophet was utterly confounded, and exclaimed, like one in despair, "Woe is me! for I am undone: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." And now Jacob feels that a sacredness breathes over that lonely spot in the desert where God is pleased to manifest His presence. When he selected the bare earth for his couch, with no roof but the arching heavens, and no pillow but the hard stone, he saw nothing there that differed from any other place in the wilderness which spread around. Everything near him wore the same appearance. But the Lord visited him there, and made the place a "Bethel," a house of God, yea, transformed it into "the gate of heaven;" so that through "this gate" Jacob was permitted to gaze upon the rich and radiant things which are hidden within the vail. In like manner the children of God discover, to their great consolation, that the presence of their heavenly Father can make the desert, through which they are compelled to travel, to "rejoice and be glad, and the wilderness and solitary place to blossom as

the rose." And it is not seldom that God makes affliction to be "the gate of heaven." For it is through trial He weans us from the world, and fixes our affections on things above. He makes the "valley of Achor a door of hope." It was when the Apostle John was an exile in the Isle of Patmos, banished there by a cruel and a bloody tyrant, that God "opened for him a door in heaven," and showed him bright visions of the New Jerusalem, and suffered his eyes to gaze on the white-robed multitude, and the radiant throng, and the glories of Him whom to look upon "was like a jasper and a sardine stone." So with the Lord's people. Times of sorrow are often times of blessing, in which heaven is brought very near, and clear glimpses of the "glory to be revealed" are let in upon the eye, and we are given strength to say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Ah, the truth of the old saying, "No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but rather grievous, yet afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby," is so often verified in the experience of the Christian, that many a man has found tribulation to be the gate to glory. When the child of God has been called to stand by the grave of one loved and lost, or has been made to witness the wreck of a good fortune, or has been stretched on

a sick bed, he has felt—as he gazed through his gathering tears on that narrow house where the dust precious to him was placed, or as he sat amid the ruins of former wealth, or as he lay upon his bed of languor and pain—he has felt, as Jacob did when he rose from his solitary couch in the desert, and exclaimed, "Surely this is the gate of heaven."

There is one other thought which briefly claims our attention. There is not one who may not find the sanctuary whither he resorts to worship God, a "Bethel," "the house of God, the gate of heaven." Going up to "the gates of Zion," we may say, "Surely the Lord is in this place." "God's way is in the sanctuary." We cannot doubt, though some overlook this truth, that it may be affirmed of our solemn assemblies, "The Lord is in His holy temple;" for the promise of the Redeemer must ever have its accomplishment, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." Though not visibly among us, yet, as often as we are gathered in the courts of the Lord's house, Christ is there too. We cannot see Him in all His radiant brightness, surrounded by the ministering spirits who execute His will, and who are waiting to rejoice over the repenting sinner; but He is present by His Spirit to convince the unbelieving, to strengthen the wavering, and to pour into the broken heart the oil and wine of heavenly consolation. Many

have found this to be the case. Here the miracle on the mountain top has been wrought again, and the assembled multitude has been fed with a few barley loaves and a few small fishes. Here the miracle of the wilderness has been repeated, and the Rock, smitten by the rod of faith, has again sent forth its living streams for the refreshment of the weary. "How dreadful is this place!" It is only the "fool" that will trifle with religious services and religious convictions, and that will "make a mock of sin," and despise the means of grace. There is nothing so evil as to go to the solemn services of the sanctuary with a vain and flippant mind, or with an indifference and carelessness which makes the appearance there an actual mockery of God. Oh, with what reverence we should enter the courts of the Lord's house! How we should concentrate our thoughts on the worship of God, withdrawing them from what is vain, and trifling, and earthly! And yet how many go to the church or to the chapel, who never think they are going to the house of God! Let it not be so with us. Let us "receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls." Let us use diligently and use earnestly the means of grace which God has placed within our power, and draw near unto Him through that Saviour who has brought us nigh by the blood of His own cross.

The ladder still reaches from earth to heaven;

it spans the distance between man and God. With this ladder within our reach, and presenting us with a blessed access into the holiest, let all rise and climb. Thousands once as sinful and weak as ourselves have risen by this ladder to the sunshine of God's presence. If they have got up there, why should not we? Not only patriarchs and prophets, priests and kings, martyrs and confessors, apostles and saints, but the very chief of sinners—a thief, a Magdalene, a blasphemer—pressing on each other's heels, have by this ladder scaled the mount of glory, and entered into possession of the celestial city. "Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Be not content to dwell amidst earthly things; but, with a noble ambition, aspire to "the inheritance of the saints in light." "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Awake, before you find yourself in that awful world where a "great gulf" shall be fixed between you and heaven, and no ladder to bridge it over. Between hell and heaven there is a wide, impassable, everlasting chasm, so that they which would pass from the one to the other cannot; they are confined to their prison-house of woe for ever! Then at once plant your foot upon this ladder, rise up, and climb. God helping you, by faith lay hold of Him who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

CHAPTER V.

The Night of Wrestling.

"CONTINUING INSTANT IN PRAYER."

"And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."—GENESIS XXXII. 26.

The Night of Wrestling.

Jacob is returning from Padan-aram to the country of his fathers, in the land of Canaan. It is twenty years since he left his home an exile and a wanderer — twenty years since he saw in a vision a ladder planted against the sky, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. You will remember how, immediately after the deliberate sin by which he had deceived his father and overreached his brother, the first meeting took place between him and God at Bethel. And now again, after years of mingled trial and blessing, he finds himself face to face with God. As he is journeying towards his native country, news is brought him of the deeply-injured Esau's approach, and the meeting between the two brothers, who have not seen one another for so many years, is inevitable. Jacob, therefore, in fear and trembling, prepares for the worst that may happen. He lifts up his voice in earnest prayer: "O God of my father

Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." To prayer he adds action. He divides the people that are with him into two bands, and then sends first over the brook Jabbok that part of his family which he valued least, and next that which he loved the most, that in the event of his fears proving true this might have the greatest facility in escaping. When all is done that human wisdom can suggest, when the various arrangements which he thinks necessary are completed, he flies again for help to God.

It is night—a calm, still, eastern night. The burning stars seem like gems oracular set in the deep-vaulted skies. No mist obscures, no cloud veils the solemn beauty of the heavens. Alone, on his knees before God, Jacob prepares for the expected meeting on the morrow by a night spent in

prayer. And now, in the mystery and loneliness of that eve, in the unbroken silence of the slumbering earth, and under the brilliant arch of the bending heavens, that wondrous meeting takes place between him and the Lord, from which the spot was called "Peniel," "the face of God," for ever after. As he prays, some one, suddenly seizing, wrestles with him. There is a struggle for the mastery. They grapple with each other; they contend for a doubtful victory. So passes the night, for the conflict lasts till the first gleams of morning brighten in the sky. When the mysterious Man finds that he does not prevail against Jacob, he touches the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh is put out of joint as he wrestles with him. "Let me go," exclaims the Stranger; "let me go, for the day breaketh." But Jacob having discovered who the august Being is with whom he strives, replies, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." The Stranger in return says unto him, "What is thy name?" And he answers, "Jacob." And now follows the proof that Jacob has obtained the blessing for which he wrestled. "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name? And he said, Wherefore is it

that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Let us now seach for the truths which lie hidden in this interesting history, for "our instruction in righteousness."

"There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." There can be no doubt that Jacob regarded his strange antagonist as a Being more than human—as one who was possessed of a greater than mortal power. The object of the patriarch appears to have been to detain the stranger until he should bless him, as he importunately urged. For observe, it was for a blessing that Jacob wrestled with an agonising earnestness. Esau's hatred and his own personal danger are for the time entirely forgotten. Deeper thoughts take possession of his soul. He thinks not of the peril which the morrow may bring to his family, or substance, or herds, or flocks, or his own life. Every other feeling is absorbed, swallowed up, lost in the intense anxiety that God would bless him. He has met the Being who is able to bless him, and he will struggle from sundown unto sunrise, if need be, rather than let him go without granting the passionate longing of his soul. This statement is confirmed by a passage which occurs in the Prophet Hosea. Speaking of

Jacob, the prophet uses these words: "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial." Now, whatever may have been the knowledge which Jacob had of the nature and offices of the Divine Person with whom he wrestled at Peniel, we, "upon whom the ends of the world are come," have no difficulty in recognising in Him the Second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity. What other could it be? Is it not written, "No man hath seen God at any time"? Is it not said, that "God" is One "whom no man hath seen, nor can see"? But the prophet declares that it was *God* with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel, and prevailed. And what is the natural, yea, the necessary inference? This. The Being before whom the patriarch wept and made supplication was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, "the Angel of the Covenant," the same of whom in after years Jacob on his death-bed spake, as the angel who redeemed him, and who did, long before his incarnation, often hallow this earth by His presence. Indeed, the truth is as interesting as it is instructive, that every manifestation of God that has ever been made to men has been the manifestation of that

eternal "Word" who "in the beginning was with God, and was God." It was the Word of God with whom Adam walked in the cool of the day in the young Paradise, and from whom he strove to hide after his melancholy fall. It was the Word of God who came again and again to Abraham, and who visited the patriarchs in their tents. It was the Word of God whom Moses saw in the Mount, and whose glory appeared in the Bush that burned and was not consumed. It was the Word of God before whose ineffable splendour Isaiah beheld the Seraphim veil their faces, as they cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." From the earliest ages God could only be approached and worshipped through Him who in "the fulness of time" was to be "manifest in the flesh for us men and for our salvation." Take some illustrations of this truth.

Look at that scene which is taking place outside the gates of Eden, and within sight of the cherubim with the flaming sword, which "turns every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life." You see there Adam and Eve, a weeping pair, fresh from their sin, standing by the rude altar from which the smoke of sacrifice curls up to the blue heaven. And why, although the gates of Paradise have been closed against them, is that bleeding victim accepted, and the worshippers regarded with the smile of Divine approval? Simply because the

offering is presented in faith, as a type of Him "who once in the end of the world" shall appear to "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Or turn your gaze, after the lapse of many years from the Fall, on that scene in the desert of Mount Sinai. There you behold a tabernacle erected in the wilderness, with its courts, and its altars, and its lavers, and a mighty host is gathered at the door of the solemn sanctuary, and burnt-offerings are presented by the white-robed priests, and the rising incense floats in fragrant odours to heaven. And how is it that the Holy One of Israel can receive the worship thus offered, and regard it with pleasure and satisfaction? Because "the ordinances of the first covenant were all shadows of good things to come; but the body is of Christ."

Or again, let us go up to Jerusalem, and look upon her glorious temple of marble, and cedar, and gold; let us observe the anointed priests, as they offer sacrifice in the courts of the Lord's house; let us mark the reverence of the kneeling worshippers; let us listen to the voice of prayer and the song of praise which ascends to the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and let the question be put again, How is it that "with such sacrifices God is well pleased,"—"sacrifices" which it was acknowledged "could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience"? Because in that solemn hour of atonement the worshippers have respect to another scene

and to another offering. They throw the eye of faith forward to a time when the earth is trembling, and the graves are yawning, and when, through the darkness that veils the sun at noonday, they behold the Son of God dying, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God," and hear the cry, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Through the long years that intervened between the sin of Eden and the sorrows of Calvary—between the hour in which the first promise was made to Adam and his wife, and the final accomplishment of redemption, when Jesus bowed His head upon the cross, and cried with a loud voice, "It is finished"—"God was in Christ," and only "in Christ," "reconciling the world unto Himself." It was Christ's death that was typified in every sacrifice; Christ's intercession that was represented in every cloud of incense; Christ's offices that were foreshadowed in each ceremony and rite which was in use in the legal dispensation. So the ages rolled on; and at length, "in the fulness of time," the only-begotten Son, "full of grace and truth," appeared on this earth, tempering the brightness of the Divine nature by shrouding its glories under a veil of human flesh. And what brought Him down, Son of the Highest, from the happy heights of heaven to the doleful regions of earth? "To seek and to save that which was lost." "The lost," who are they? All of us; every one of us,

high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Does any man go to the courts of the Lord's house who denies this truth? who says, "I am not a sinner"? "What doest thou here, Elijah?" may the Preacher say. What brings thee to the house of God, if thou hast no sin to be forgiven? If thou art spotless and pure, why come to this Bethesda, this "place of healing," since it is not "the whole that need a physician, but they that are sick"? Jesus "came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Who can hold up his hands in sight of the heart-searching God, and say, "These hands are clean; no sin has ever stained their purity, no guilt defiled them"? Nay, brethren, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

We all need salvation. Nay, it is the chief thing we need; it is the only thing that we really need. And, oh, it is heaven to have it; it is hell to want it. But how are we to obtain it? Through Him who bore all the penalty, that we might be saved all the punishment. Through Christ, the Daysman between us and God, we have access into the very holiest, and liberty of approach to the throne of grace. Through Christ we obtain "power to prevail with God;" and though in some night of strong agony, when we wrestle with God for pardon of sin, or peace of conscience, or purity of heart, or victory

over temptation, God should seem to say to us, through a long-delayed answer to our prayers, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," we can reply, with the holy importunity of the struggling Patriarch, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

"The night of wrestling" teaches us the duty of earnest and honest prayer. There was a spiritual wrestling on the part of Jacob, as well as a physical. "He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto Him." There must be the same reality and intensity, the same earnestness and the same perseverance, in the prayers which we offer unto God. Brother, have you thought of this? You may "say your prayers" every day — "say" them from the cradle to the grave — you may be punctual morning and evening and noonday in repeating a form of words — but, if you would obtain a blessing, the heart must pray as well as the lip. The prayer of cold formality, the prayer of the wandering mind and the thoughtless tongue, never soars away to heaven, or mounts to the throne of God. Prayer is more a heart cry than a lip expression.

Look on that scene which is passing on the lake of Galilee, in a night of tempest and of storm. A small boat is tossed on the curling waves, now rising on the top of the billows, now sinking down into the yawning sea. During the fierce commotion

of the storm one individual alone in that ship is unmoved; and *He* sleeps as calmly, amid the roar of the elements, as any child that is cradled on its mother's bosom, and is rocked by the beating of its mother's heart. Strong men, pale with terror, gather round that sleeping form, and laying rude hands upon Him, wake Him up, crying, "Master, master, save us, we perish." *That* is prayer; and were we always to act under the same pressing sense of need, with the same urgent desire to obtain, we should find that God would hear us, and grant us the request of our lips. Did we call upon Christ with the anxiety which the disciples felt when overcome by the terrors of the tempest—did we plead to be saved from sin, as they pleaded to be saved from the waves, how He would delight in attending to the voice of our cry, fulfilling His own promise, "Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

Now turn from that lake of Galilee to this garden which lies retired and apart. Under the shadow of the olive-trees there is a kneeling figure. Gleams of the moonlight fall upon the weary and wasted form of "the Man of Sorrows," and on the face which "is more marred than any of the sons of men." Like Jacob, He is wrestling with God. He is "offering up prayers with strong crying and tears." He is in such an agony of supplication that "His sweat is as it were great drops of blood

falling down to the ground." Three times over He uses the same words: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" *That* is prayer—fervent, importunate, impassioned. Those tears, those cries, those unutterable groanings of the soul, oh, how different from the petitions that we offer, when we come languidly to the throne of grace, to ask "for grace, and for mercy to help in time of need!" Oh, how much need we have to pray for that Spirit who teaches us how to pray, "who helps our infirmities, and makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered!" We are not half so earnest in prayer as we ought to be; and this is the reason we do not receive the things that we crave. But you say, "Is not God willing to grant us what we need; is He not 'always more ready to hear than we are to pray;' is He not 'wont to give us more than either we desire or deserve'?" True, most true. We have not to wrest the gift from an unwilling hand. "He giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." But He will be "inquired of by us." For it is thus that He calls out our faith and patience, and puts both these graces on their trial. But never think that He gives unwillingly, or that "if we ask for bread He will give us a stone, or for a fish, that He will give us a serpent." Better He is than the best of earthly fathers. He is full of mercy, and only "waiteth to be gracious." Yet

some regard Him with suspicion and distrust, and look upon Him as one of those fathers whom we sometimes meet in this world, who with the means to supply them, permit their children to mourn over wants unsupplied, desires unfulfilled, cares unrelieved. Ah, how many a home is robbed of all its endearing attributes, stripped of all those happy associations which should make the very name a symbol of happiness, and peace, and joy, a memory so blessed that it never fades from the mind, and lingers with us even when we lay our heads on the dying pillow,—how many a home is spoiled of all that is holy and loving in the world, by the forbidding, repulsive aspect and conduct of him who bears the appellation of husband and father! But, my Christian brother, no such Father as this presides in the home above over the whole family of man. He who sits on the throne of grace is "the God of grace." "God is love." He is able, He is willing "to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think." Why, then, does your faith shine so dimly? Why does your love burn so feebly? Why does your soul cleave to the dust? Why are you not holier, more heavenly, than you are? Whose fault is it that you are not farther advanced in the heavenly race? At whose door lies the blame of your slow progress in the Divine life? You cannot reproach your Father with being an unwilling giver. No,

no! He has said, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And were you only as fervent and as importunate in prayer as Jacob was in wrestling with the angel, you would long since have made large advances in light and love, in holiness and in joy. Be earnest: this is the secret of all successful prayer, earnest as is the starving man for bread or the drowning man for escape. God will be "wrestled with;" wrestled with through the long night of this world until the very breaking of the eternal day; and though He keep silence, giving no reply, sending no relief, though He should through difficulties and obstacles seem to say to us, "Let me go, for the day breaketh;" the spirit that animated Jacob must be ours, and we must cry out with all the energy of a determined will, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!"

It is related in the narrative of this "Night of Wrestling," that when the angel prevailed not against Jacob, "he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him." We learn from this that Jacob overcame, not by his own strength, but simply by permission. The angel in a moment could have destroyed him; and to prove this, he, by a touch, withered up a sinew of his limbs. So when we wrestle with God in prayer, we prevail

not through any innate might, but through the power of that "Spirit who helpeth our infirmities," and the grace of that Saviour whose "strength is made perfect in weakness." And we seldom overcome without being wounded — wounded, too, in the tenderest point. For what is the way in which God often answers our prayers? To use the Psalmist's expression, "by terrible things in righteousness." We little know all that we are asking for, when we ask for more heavenliness, more saintliness, more of "the mind that is in Jesus Christ." We may be asking for trial, sorrow, trouble; seeing that it is "through much tribulation" that the Christian character is perfected, and that we are conformed to the image of God. With the blessing that we obtain, we obtain also the dislocated limb, disappointment, beds of sickness and pain, severed ties, opened graves, and the thousand other sorrows which are our necessary discipline for "the inheritance of the saints in light." And like Jacob, we carry the wound with us through life — the scar remains deeply burnt into the heart. We never forget the place or hour when God put forth His hand and touched us; when He turned affluence into poverty, or laid us on a bed of sickness, or "took away the desire of our eyes with a stroke," and constrained us to lay our loved one in a lonesome grave. Nevertheless, the blessing which is also given should be more

than a recompense for the tribulation. Anything that brings us nearer to God, and conforms us more to the image of Christ, should be welcomed with pleasure. And is not the cross preparing us for the crown, seeing that we are able to "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy of being compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us"?

Another incident in this "Night of Wrestling" requires a few remarks. Before Jacob parted from the mysterious man with whom he struggled, he desired to know his name. "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name; and he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there." Blessed be God, we who live under clearer light, we who in these latter days are under the dispensation of the Spirit, have no need to ask "the name" of the angel of the covenant. It has been made known to us in all its fulness and beauty and power. In the name "Jesus" we recognise a "name" that reveals the Saviour's office, and makes known the Saviour's work. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Ah, this "Name" is as ointment poured forth; it is stamped on the heart of the child of God; it is sweeter in his ears than the richest strains of any earthly music whatsoever. It is a "Name" that, uttered in olden times by the lips of faith, had a resistless

power; healing disease; shedding light on the darkened eyeball; restoring vigour to the withered limb; and breathing life into the cold pulses of death. It is a "Name" which, now spoken in the ear of faith, brings with it a message of pardon and of peace such as can meet every want; of happiness such as supplies every yearning of the heart of man, and can impart consolation in the dreariest hours of this sad and changeful human life. It is a "Name" which, when all others have been forgotten, when from the blank mind all other objects have been effaced, has awakened an echo in the soul, and touched an electric cord which has recalled memory to her seat. Have we not read of saints who, in their dying hour, have been insensible to all earthly things,—the darkness of death seeming to wrap from their eyes every passing object,—and when a weeping wife and children have gathered round their bed, and have spoken to them in words of endearment, seeking to draw their attention to their own love and sorrow, no response has been given; and it has appeared as though the spirit had already begun its journey to heaven? But when the "Name," above all names, has been spoken, when some one, bending over the couch, has breathed the name of Jesus in their ears, then a brighter light in the eye, and a softer smile round the lip, have told distinctly that the soul was still lingering

on the confines of earth, though ready and longing to depart, and to be with that Saviour "whom, having not seen, it loved, and in whom, though now it saw him not, yet believing, it rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory." "May we die the death of the righteous, and may our last end be like his!"

"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." There are times in the life of all the children of God when they have a clearer view of the Invisible, when they see, as it were, "God face to face." In some night of sorrow, when darkness is around us, and all help from man is in vain, and earth appears as nothing, then the sense of God's nearness is forced upon us, and we seem to stand in the very light of His presence. We realise, as we never did before, that God is with us of a truth. Sometimes in the sanctuary we have clear impressions that He is nigh; and at our Sabbath services, and communion seasons, and means of grace, we are made to feel that surely "God is in this place." At times like these He comes with a message to our soul; "we see Him like Jacob, face to face." These are, indeed, but glimpses of His glory: such times are few and far between; we cannot long retain the sense of His presence. He departs after a short season. But this is not always to be the case: there is a world

which shall be to us an everlasting "Peniel," for there we shall "see face to face, and know even as we are known." In the sevenfold light of Zion, God's children shall behold the unveiled face of their King, and there "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." His presence shall never be withdrawn, and we shall live in the lustre of His glorious countenance throughout the ages of heaven. "We shall follow Him whithersoever He goeth," and reigning with Him on thrones of judgment, and wearing with Him crowns of light, shall "go out no more" from that world for ever. Oh, may we know what it is to dwell in the glorious presence of our Saviour and our God! May we know, when all earthly things have faded, "when prophecies have failed, and tongues have ceased, and knowledge has vanished away," that the grace which is in the name "Jesus" is not exhausted yet, nor ever shall be, but shall be enjoyed by us in "the pleasures that are at God's right hand, and the fulness of joy that is there for evermore!"

But shall we? This is the all-important question. May not you, my brother, be "living without God, and without Christ, in the world"? You know nothing of God as a Father, or Jesus as a Saviour, or of the Spirit as a Sanctifier. Your closet has no testimony to give of earnest prayer, and fervent devotion, and blessed communion with God. You have never been alive to the difficulties

and dangers of your state; have never cried out for relief; have never broken loose from the world, or given yourself to the Lord. And how is all this to end? Will you persevere in spurning from you the promises of joy and peace, and in despising the gracious offers of the Gospel? Ah, God help you! God help you! for the help of man is vain. God in His mercy show you your folly, your madness, and break the spell of sin; and taking away the evil and impenitent heart, give you wisdom to "know the things that belong unto your peace before they are for ever hid from your eyes!"

But it may be, that with these thoughts before you, you will lift up your heart in prayer; it may be that your soul will wrestle this very night alone in secret with God for a blessing. When only God's eye sees you, when only God's ear hears you, the scene on which we have been meditating may be repeated. "The strong crying" of a broken and contrite heart may find expression in these words, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me!" Thy chamber, even thine, may become a "Peniel," a place where, for the first time, you "see God face to face," and where having, through Christ, power to prevail with God, you will become "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" one from whom "old things are passed away," and for whom "all things have become new." God grant this for your salvation, and for His glory!

CHAPTER VI.

The Night of the Death of the Firstborn.

"AND SMOTE ALL THE FIRSTBORN IN EGYPT: THE CHIEF OF THEIR STRENGTH IN THE TABERNACLES OF HAM."

"And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."—EXODUS XII. 30.

The Night of the Death of the Firstborn.

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." "And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night." Like that pillar of cloud and fire, the providential dealings of God have a twofold aspect—an aspect of mercy and of judgment. To His own people, mercy: to His enemies, judgment.* The night, which was one of deliverance and redemption to the children of Israel, was one of destruction and death to the Egyptians. "The night to be much observed unto the Lord," has its shadows as well as its lights;

* First Series, Chapters VI. and VII.

has its lessons of warning for the proud and rebellious, as well as its lessons of encouragement for the humble and obedient. It is the darker side of the picture that comes under review in the present instance; it is to the suffering that follows hard on the heels of sin, that we claim attention when treating of "The Night of the Death of the Firstborn."

In looking at the long series of plagues which were sent as messengers of death on the land of Egypt: storm, and hail, murrain, and thick darkness, water turned into blood, and every herb of the field devoured by an army of locusts—plagues which were closed by the judgment that had been first threatened, the death of the firstborn; and which were terribly supplemented by the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea—in looking at this long series of plagues, attention must be given to the oppressor and tyrant of Israel, Pharaoh. He is not to be regarded as a solitary and isolated individual, pursuing his own wilful and wayward course; he must be looked at in relation to God and His Church. We must rise above all shallow and superficial views of his conduct, and strive to enter into the grand and Divine purposes that were connected with the redemption of Israel from the cruel bondage of the Egyptian king, who feared not God, neither regarded man, And in order to form a proper conception of the Divine

power and plan in the destruction of Pharaoh, and the accomplishment of Israel's deliverance, it must ever be borne in mind that the Israelites were the chosen people of God, standing to Him in the closest covenant relationship, and occupying a position of nearness to Jehovah, such as was held by no other nation on the face of the earth. With them was bound up in a very peculiar sense the honour of God, and the salvation of mankind: and hence the tyrant who oppressed and afflicted them, trampled on rights which God had conferred, and provoked the execution of a curse which God had solemnly denounced on the enemies of the elect nation. For did he not say to Abraham, the father of the faithful, when He called him out from his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"? Therefore, as the blessing of heaven above rested on the Israelites, and as their cause and the cause of God was one, Pharaoh, in acting towards this people as an enemy, in oppressing and enslaving them, was leaguing himself with the great Adversary of the Divine purposes, who, filled with wrath, and knowing that his own defeat was involved in the preservation of the promised seed, would fain have seen the extinction of the race from which Messiah was to spring. The deliverance of Israel from the house of bond-

age was like an earnest of the grand work of redemption—the overthrow of the devil, and the final establishment of righteousness and truth and liberty in a world which had fallen under Satan's power, and passed for a season under his hard and bitter yoke. It was typical of a mightier redemption. Such being the case, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt could only be effected by the execution of such a judgment on the Adversary as would secure an illustrious display of the glorious attributes of Jehovah, and at the same time constrain all who were witness to the dealings of God to acknowledge the Divine righteousness, and to utter the confession, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!" And as not alone Pharaoh's humiliation and Israel's redemption, but a higher design than either was to be secured by the deliverance of the Hebrews from the house of bondage, each circumstance must have been arranged by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Nay, since each succeeding judgment, as it fell upon the land, was declared to be the result of "the hardening of Pharaoh's heart," must not "the hardening" itself have formed an essential element in the whole plan, and be referred to the sovereign counsels of the Divine will? Indeed, this resistance of Pharaoh's was announced to Moses at the outset, as an event

that might be expected. It is thus written in the fourth chapter and at the twenty-first verse: "When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: *but I will harden his heart,* that he shall not let the people go." And again it is stated in the seventh chapter, and in the opening verses: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. *And I will harden Pharaoh's heart,* and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. *But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.* And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring all the children of Israel from among them." And once more, we read in the ninth chapter and at the sixteenth verse, that God commissioned Moses to make this statement to Pharaoh himself: "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." These words are quoted by the Apostle Paul in the ninth chapter of his

Epistle to the Romans, when he is writing on the sovereignty of God, and he appends this comment: "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth."

It is very true that it is also said in the sacred narrative that when the plague was removed, and there was a respite, "Pharaoh hardened his own heart," and refused to let Israel go. And in the opinion of some, this latter statement throws light upon the former: and they hold that when it is said "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," nothing more is intended than that God left the king to the workings of his own evil heart, and permitted him to persevere in his rebellion. They suppose that God, moved by the obstinacy of Pharaoh, withdrew from him gradually all the restraints of His grace, and that, as these restraints were more and more removed, the heart of the king grew more and more hardened. But this does not appear to be a sufficient explanation of the case. It is impossible to separate "the hardening of Pharaoh's heart" from the entire plan and purpose of God, or to overlook the distinct manner in which it is ascribed to the Divine agency. Tholuck has the following thoughts on the subject: "That the hardening of the Egyptian was, on one side, ordained by God, no disciple of Christian theology can deny. It is an essential doctrine of the Bible that God would not permit evil, unless

He were lord over it; and that He permits it, because it cannot act as a check upon His plan of the world, but must be equally subservient to Him as good. The only difference being that the former is compulsorily, the latter optionally." I fully maintain that God can in no possible sense be the author of sin; for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." In so far as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart partook of sin, the guilt was altogether his own; it was in the exercise of his free and unfettered will that he persevered in his haughty opposition to the Divine command, and refused to let Israel depart from the land. But, granting thus much, this does not exclude the direct and positive agency of God in the matter, who not only determined the manner and extent of the opposition, but who also "brought about those circumstances which made the heart, already disposed to evil, still harder." The very mercy and goodness of God in so readily removing the plague, under whose terrible scourge the king appeared for the moment to relent, had a hardening effect on Pharaoh's mind, and tended to strengthen him in his wilful and rebellious career. And God all the while, by both mercy and judgment, was but using this beguiled and benighted man for His own glory, and the good of His people. Pharaoh, unconscious of the high hand that was controlling his course—flattered by

his fawning courtiers, and relying on his artful magicians, imagined that he was promoting his own ambitious ends, whereas he was but a tool in the hands of Israel's God. How literally true were the words spoken by Moses in the ears of this king by the command of God, "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth!" And what a light does this whole history throw on the inspired words, "The wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain!" And this is universally true. The wicked are serving God, albeit, they suppose they are serving self, and seem to be running counter to His will. They are "a sword" in the Divine hand, just used so long as they are needed to further the Divine purposes, then broken, and cast aside. Ah! see that you are on God's side. Let His glory be your aim. "Fear the Lord, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way." Before Him "every knee must bow," if not willingly, then by constraint. To Him every tongue must confess, if not cheerfully, then by ungrateful force. Let us be assured that the whole course of nature, and providence, and grace, is tending onwards to a time when He alone shall be exalted, and when it shall be acknowledged throughout the universe of God, "Thou art

worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Solemn words! Mysterious statement! "He has made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." But though mysterious — awful — a statement confirmed by the whole history of the tyrant king of Egypt, and by the appalling events of the Night of the Death of the Firstborn: "That night when Pharaoh rose up, he and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead."

But another point must be explained before we can hope to understand all the dealings of God in this "Night of the Death of the Firstborn."

The question suggests itself, "Why were Egypt's firstborn singled out for death?" There can be no doubt that the judgment had respect to the covenant relationship which Israel owed to Jehovah. The first message which God sent by his servant Moses to Pharaoh, was couched in these words: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." The children of Israel might well be styled "the firstborn of God," inasmuch as they

were the chosen seed and heirs of the promised inheritance; and from them, in the fulness of time, was to come the Saviour of the world. They were also the type of the redeemed from amongst men; the germ of that Church which was to include within its fold all who were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." And as these, the firstborn in God's own family, were to be ransomed and delivered, so were the firstborn in the house of the enemy—the beginning of his increase, and the heirs of his substance—to be destroyed and slain. Thus the redemption of the chosen seed became an earnest that all who are brought nigh to God by the actings of His grace, are appointed to life and blessing; while the destruction of the enemy was in like manner a pledge that all who set themselves in opposition to the Divine will shall be visited with the recompense due unto their deeds.

We may see in Israel's relation to Egypt an accurate representation of the relation of the Church to the world. The chosen people were in themselves no better than those around them: they were in subjection to the enemy—inhabitants of the doomed territory—partakers in the guilt and corruption of the Egyptians. It was the mercy of God which alone made them to differ; and their exemption from Egypt's curse depended entirely on the death of the Paschal lamb. The

blood of this lamb, sprinkled by the command of God on the lintel and the two side posts, was a sign between them and God: on His part, a sign that in accordance with the purpose of His revealed covenant, He accepted a ransom on their behalf, for the sake of which "no evil should come nigh their dwelling;" and on their part, a sign that they owned the God of Abraham as their God, and would "keep His statues, and walk in His judgments, and do them." And in consideration of the gracious redemption which had been wrought for them by "His mighty hand and outstretched arm," God claimed the firstborn among the people as peculiarly His own. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn: whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, it is mine."

The setting apart of the firstborn, by a holy consecration, to the Lord — the firstborn being considered as the representatives of each household of the nation — was designed as a solemn declaration that God claimed the entire people as exclusively His. As the firstborn had been, as to their redemption from death, the proxies in a manner of the whole, so were they, in their subsequent consecration, to be the examples and patterns of the holiness which should characterize the entire body. Here we may apply the

words of St. Paul: "For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump also is holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches."

But, leaving the general history, interesting as shedding light on God's dealings with His Church, let us inquire if there be any lessons of practical value for ourselves. And there are. As the first-born of Israel were set apart to the Lord by the shedding of blood and special consecration, so the children of God are in like manner called out from a world "lying in the Wicked One," and dedicated to the service of Him who has prepared for them a kingdom. Are you a professing disciple of the Saviour? Though *in* the world, do you say that you are not *of* it? Do you acknowledge that here you have no abiding city, and that you look for one to come? Do you confess that you are only strangers and pilgrims on earth, and that a heavenly country is your home? Then, are you acting in consistency with this confession? Are you living from day to day as though you realized the great truth contained in these words of the Apostle: "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"? "Bought with a price, ye are not your own;" ye are the exclusive property of Him who told down your ransom in blood — ay, in blood: "For ye were redeemed not with corruptible things as silver

and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.'' "Feed," saith the Apostle to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, "feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." O that price, all other price beyond! God Himself, with the riches of heaven and earth at His command, with the treasures of the universe at His disposal, had nothing more precious than that —"the blood" of His Incarnate Son—of the Word made flesh; and with this He has bought, purchased, redeemed you. Are you then your own—body or soul your own? Nay, are you not His—His all the powers of your mind: His all the passions of your heart; His all the energies of your body; His all the affections of your soul? What is there that you have that is not His? Talents, health, strength, substance—all are His. Have you thought of this as you ought? Does any one think of this as he ought? Oh, let us seek, in the spirit of prayer and holy meditation, to recognise God's claim upon us — God's title to us—God's purchase of us and ours; and with the full and frank recognition of the truth, let us "present ourselves — our souls and bodies — as lively and holy sacrifices unto God, which is only our reasonable service." If we are God's firstborn —His children, and as children, then, His heirs—let us live as men whose heart is in heaven, whose

hope and home are there, and whose thoughts, desires, and aims are all fastened on "the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Heir of grace! thy treasures are there. Child of God! be ever pressing on and looking up. Ransomed soul! set free from sin, and victor over death, thine be the language of the triumphant Apostle, as thou hastenest onwards with thy fellow-heirs in mercy: "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."

And now turn to consider the fearful and awful judgment which made that "great cry" to rise throughout all the land of Egypt.

As each succeeding plague had only the effect of calling out the evil of Pharaoh's heart, and hardening it the more, God at length determined to let loose, according to His word, His sorest plague upon the land; for though the Lord is "slow to to anger," He is not mocked. The destroying angel is sent forth on his terrible commission, and smites "all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts."

What a night is that! The shades of evening close in; the darkness thickens; the hours advance; the crisis approaches. Sleep visits the stubborn king in his splendid palace; it seals the eyes of his courtiers in their luxurious chambers; it steals over the wearied limbs of the labourer in his lowly dwelling; and presses lightly on the lids of the tired woman who has ground corn all day at the mill. The cattle rest in their stalls, the sheep within their folds. The land lies buried in slumber. Some houses there are where sleep comes not that night. The Israelites are awake and astir; there is light in their dwellings; they are up and busy, preparing the paschal sacrifice, and keeping the paschal feast. The red mark of the sprinkled blood glistens in the moonlight on the lintels and door-posts.

Well is it that the crimson mark is there; for hark! there is the sound as of the rushing of wings through the air. It is the destroying angel, as he pays his death-bearing visit to every Egyptian house, passing over those houses only where the red showers of blood mark an Israelite's dwelling. And now the midnight stillness is broken by a wild shriek of dismay; a long-drawn wail is heard filling the houses of the Egyptians with doleful clamour; there is "mourning, and lamentation, and woe," in the royal palace, in the stately mansion, in the prisoner's dungeon, in the labourer's

cabin. From field and fold, from stall and stable, the cry of dire and bitter anguish comes, thrilling the ear, chilling the heart; for throughout the breadth and length of the land "there is not a house where there is not one dead." Grim death has entered every household, and laid his awful hand on the firstborn in each several stage of life —the man, the youth, the infant. In a moment the victim is smitten down — "the desire of the eyes taken away with a stroke." Adopting the words of the prophet, and applying them to Egypt, we may say of this night, "In Egypt is there a voice heard—lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning — Rachel weeping for her children, and will not be comforted, because they are not." Hear in the echoes of that loud weeping "the exceeding sinfulness of sin." Hear in it also the inflexible justice of God. Learn how He at times cometh out of His place to punish the nation that sins, as well as the individual man who dares to defy His will; see how He "avenges His own elect," and how He "does not at all acquit the guilty." Ah! "stand in awe, and sin not." "There was a great cry in Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead."

Shall I be straining Scripture unwarrantably if I give these words a secondary application? If I take them in other than their literal meaning, it is only that I may thus reach a spiritual truth. Well,

then, when we consider the prevalence of spiritual death, and its appalling consequences, may there not be "a great cry" in every household in England? Is there any house into which we can enter without having reason to say, There is "one dead" here? Though no flagrant sin may defile any member of the family, yet where is the house in which every individual is alive unto God and quickened by the Holy Ghost? Tell me where that happy home is to be found, where the father, and the mother, and the children, and the serving-men and women, are each and all partakers of the life of the Spirit.

It is a solemn thing to enter a house where lies the body of one lately deceased—to mark the stillness, the silence—to see the darkened chamber, the clouded faces, the signs of sorrow on every hand; and if the house be our own—if it be a husband or wife, a parent or child, that lies stiff and stark on yonder bed,—how bitter the anguish of our hearts! But what is the death of the body to that soul-death which may at this moment be rife within your dwellings—the death in trespasses and sins of some inmate of your home? Nay, ART THOU ALIVE? or if quickened thyself, are none dear to you dead — living "without God, and without Christ, and without hope in the world"? And if so, how are you dealing with them? Are you showing any concern or care for their sad con-

dition? In all your communion with them, in all your interchange of fellowship and love, is there no thought of eternity, no regard to heaven? Amongst all the subjects of daily and familiar converse, is religion alone excluded? Do you enter into their feelings and fancies, their pleasures and pursuits, and yet banish from your intercourse all reference to "the one thing which is needful"? Alas! for your Christian consistency, if this be so. Awake to your solemn responsibility; and, as one who professes to believe that "the wages of sin is death"—that the "second death," with its eternal separation from the Fountain of all life is the portion of all who "know not God, and obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ,"—tell those in danger of perishing, of a God above them, a judgment before them, and a Saviour near, even at the door. Although there well may be "a cry" in your house for the dead in sin, yet it need not be a cry of unmitigated anguish and despair; the dead may be restored to life. In Egypt the mourning for the firstborn was hopeless; not so ours. The death which we sorrow for in others may be broken up, and give way to spiritual life. God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. He would rather that all men should turn to Him and live. Therefore you may hopefully lay your hand on your brother, or your sister, and utter the thrilling, urgent, earnest call in their ears: "Awake, thou that sleepest,

and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!" All your tender longings and loving efforts for souls in God and in Christ shall be met and rewarded; the cry of sorrow over the dead shall be changed into a song of joy over the living; angels shall mingle their rejoicings with yours as they see the sinner repenting; and the Father of all mercy and grace Himself shall be well pleased as He proclaims throughout the sympathizing mansions of heaven,—"This, my son that was dead, is alive again; and he that was lost is found."

CHAPTER VII.

The Night of Deliverance.

"AND HE SAVED THEM FROM THE HAND OF HIM THAT HATED THEM, AND REDEEMED THEM FROM THE HAND OF THE ENEMY."

"It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out of the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations."—EXODUS XII. 42.

The Night of Deliverance.

Under the oppression of a new king that knew not Joseph, the lives of the children of Israel were made bitter with hard bondage. The reigning Pharaoh, fearing the rapid increase of this strange people, and regarding them with jealousy and suspicion, began to afflict them with heavy burdens, and to subject them to the most rigorous bondage. When this stern treatment failed to have the desired effect, the king issued a cruel edict, commanding that all the male children of the Hebrews should be slain so soon as they were born. So excessive became the tyranny at length, that one universal cry of anguish and distress arose from the once happy land of Goshen, — a cry which entered the ear of the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. In answer to its piteous wail, He came down to "avenge His own elect," and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large; unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses, who, "when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," is the appointed deliverer by whose hand Jehovah determines to liberate His people from their bondage. He is commissioned to go to Pharaoh, and to speak these words in his ears: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." Pharaoh only returns the insolent answer, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." But though God might at once visit him with the fierceness of His wrath, and send the destroying angel through the length and breadth of the land, yet He restrains His avenging arm, and suffers not His whole anger to arise. He strives, by less appalling judgments, to make an impression on the hard heart of Egypt's king, and to persuade him to let the Israelites go. By the hand of Moses He brings upon the land storm, and hail, and murrain, and thick darkness; and endeavours, by signs and wonders, stern and startling, to subdue Pharaoh to His will. But, although plague after plague is sent — the very waters being turned into blood, and every herb of

the land being devoured by a swarm of locusts — yet does the haughty monarch harden his heart the more, and he refuses to obey the Lord, or to hearken to His voice. And now, when God has by the first nine plagues vindicated His power, and proved that He has only been "waiting to be gracious," He resolves to inflict the judgment that had been first threatened; for the king of Egypt has rejected the previous warning, and after his "hardness and impenitent heart" has "treasured up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." In the darkness of midnight the destroying angel, with his glittering and furbished sword, shall go forth through Egypt, and smiting "all the firstborn, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sits on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that is in the dungeon," shall fill every house with "mourning, and lamentation, and woe."

Let us imagine ourselves in the land of Egypt on the night of Israel's deliverance. It is the spring of the year, and the fourteenth day of the month Abib. The shadows of night have long rested over all the land, and the Egyptians have returned to their homes from the mart and from the field, from the revel and from the dance. They have ceased for a short season to oppress the children of Israel; and, knowing that the people are going on the morrow to offer a solemn sacrifice

unto the Lord their God, they have given them, on their demand, every man his neighbour, and every woman her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. The busy world lies hushed in the arms of slumber. Not a footfall sounds in the empty thoroughfares. Silence reigns throughout the land. But, hark! the stillness is broken by a dread and mysterious sound. It is the rushing of the destroying angel's wing, as he proceeds on his fearful errand of vengeance, and sweeps through the length and breadth of the country, carrying death and desolation in his path. There rises from every house an exceeding bitter cry, wrung from the hearts of parents, as they gaze on the corpses of their firstborn. Mothers see their sweet babes stricken down in an instant, fathers behold the pride and joy of their lives turned into dull and senseless clay. "There is not a house where there is not one dead." In the royal palace, in the guarded prison, in the lowly cottage, the Angel of death has been doing his avenging work; for every family has to mourn its dead, and the wail of the bereaved thrills wildly along the air.

But look at this other scene. We are in the home of one of the Hebrews. Though it is night, "when deep sleep falleth upon man," yet all the household is astir. What meaneth this eager excitement and activity? Here are men who have their loins girt, their shoes on their feet, and

their staves in their hands, like those prepared for a long journey. Four days before they had gathered the bleating flocks from their different pastures, and sought up and down among them till "a lamb without blemish" had been found, "a male of the first year," perfect and mature. For four days this lamb, chosen as an offering, and taken from the rest of the flock, was set apart by itself. And to-night the father of the Hebrew home brings forth the lamb in presence of the household, and puts it to death; and as the blood flows to the knife, he catches it in a basin, and amid solemn silence directs that the carcase be roasted with fire. "Not a bone of the lamb is to be broken;" no part of the flesh is to be carried forth out of the house; the whole is to be eaten in one house; nor is any of the family to pass the threshold till the morning. And what is this that the head of the household now proceeds to do? Mark how he "takes a bunch of hyssop, and dips it into the blood that is in the basin, and strikes the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the basin." When this ceremony is finished, the whole household stands with sandalled feet, and girded loins, and staff in hand, at the family board, and in haste begins to eat the lamb, taking with it unleavened bread and bitter herbs. As they are thus engaged, there is a deep stillness in the chamber; a reverential awe settles upon all

hearts. And the feeling of dread increases as midnight approaches; and it deepens into intensity as the rushing of the angel's wings is heard passing over their door to smite the Egyptian, whose first-born is doomed to destruction. Oh, what solemn emotion fills all minds as the sound of "mourning and lamentation and woe" startles the ear of night, and assures them that "the Lord is a God that taketh vengeance!" And how is it that their own house is spared? How comes it that the angel does not fold his wings at the Israelite's door; that *there* he enters not to fulfil a mission of death? Because he sees the blood of the Paschal lamb upon the lintel and on the two side-posts. It is the mark of the blood which preserves the Hebrew household from sharing in the destruction of the Egyptians on this night of deliverance, — "this night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations."

But let us now turn our thoughts to the typical significance of the feast instituted to commemorate this night of deliverance. For the ordinance of the Passover pointed to the future. The redemption from the land of Egypt, with its ever-recurring memorial, contained the germ and promise of the salvation of the Church. The lamb perpetually offered to commemorate the past, pointed the expectant eye of faith to the Lamb of God, to be slain in the fulness of time for the sin

of the world. When "Christ our Passover" was sacrificed for us, then did the purpose of God, which lay enclosed as an embryo in the Paschal institution, become fully developed.

The lamb was to be "without blemish and without spot, a male of the first year." This finds its Antitype in "the holy child Jesus," who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, and who, although made of a woman, was miraculously kept free from all the stains of our corrupt and fallen humanity. The innocent lamb, spotless, and separated from the flock, was a most perfect type of Him who was "without spot or blemish"—who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Though Jesus took our sins upon Him, He was absolutely without sin. "The prince of this world had nothing in Him." He was the incarnation of all that was great, and good, and pure, and sublime in the Godhead. And as the lamb was to be a "male of the first year," so did He, in the prime of His manhood, offer up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He from "a child increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man," until His human powers and faculties attained their full maturity; and then, when as yet no weakness or decay marred His strength or affected His vigour, He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Again, it was commanded concerning the Paschal lamb, that they "were not to break a bone thereof." Now, this type was remarkably fulfilled at the crucifixion. It is written in the Gospel, that when "Jesus had cried with a loud voice," showing that He did not die from exhaustion, but that, as He Himself had said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up;" as soon as He had "cried with a loud voice, He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." You are aware that there was something singular in the fact that Jesus died so soon. Crucifixion was a lingering death. The person nailed to the cross was many hours in dying. That such was the case is proved by the sufferings of the two malefactors who were crucified with our Lord. According to the Jewish custom, the bodies of those who had been crucified were required to be removed on the same day on which they died. The Jews, therefore, besought Pilate that they might break the limbs, and thus put an end to the agonies of those who were crucified, as it was then the preparation day before the Sabbath. This was usually done with clubs; after which a stroke on the breast terminated the life of the unhappy criminal. When Pilate sent the soldiers to perform this duty, they brake the legs of the first and of the second, but "when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs." And the Apostle adds

this comment: "These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken."

Again, "the lamb was to be roast with fire." What was this but a type of the sufferings which Jesus endured when "He made His soul an offering for sin"? The roasting of the lamb, that it might be prepared for the family of the believing Jew, was intended to furnish an image of the wrath of God—of the pangs which the Saviour had to pass through when He was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." The fires of the Divine justice descended upon our Substitute, and sorely wrung Him with a terrible anguish, and from Him, a living sacrifice, exacted the full penalty of our sins.

When the lamb had been duly roasted according to the command, it was to be eaten with many significant observances, each of which is worthy of a few remarks. But first let us fasten our thoughts on the fact that it was to be "*eaten*." Each member of the family in whose house it was slain was commanded to partake of the flesh. Does not this teach us, that not only is the blood of Christ to be sprinkled on the heart and conscience, but that we must *live on* Christ, and hourly derive fresh sustenance and support from His grace? "Verily, I say unto you," were the words of Jesus to His disciples, "except ye eat the flesh of the

Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." And the Communion Service of the Church of England beautifully explains these expressions of the Saviour, when we are bidden in it "to feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving." It is on Christ Himself that we must live. However valuable be the doctrines taught in the Bible, these in themselves have no life for the soul. We must not rest in them; we must look above and beyond them to Jesus. Neither must we lose the Saviour in His work,—the Redeemer in His redemption. Never let the offices of Christ obscure the glory of His Person. It is not justification that we are to rejoice in so much as the Justifier. "The life which I live in the flesh," saith the Apostle, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." Again he says, "Christ is our life;" to "me to live is Christ." So that Christ, our Paschal Lamb, is to be our daily food; from Him directly are we to derive the nourishment which is needful to sustain us in our pilgrimage through the wilderness to a brighter and a better land. Hearken again to the Saviour's own words: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath

sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

But again: the lamb was to be "eaten with bitter herbs." Now this signifies that Christ must be eaten with the bitter herbs of repentance. Whilst we rejoice in the thought of our deliverance from sin and hell through the mediation of our Substitute, we are to "mourn as we look upon Him whom we have pierced;" we are to sorrow as we remember how we have "crucified Him afresh, and put Him to an open shame." There can be no genuine reception of Christ as a Saviour without the sincere acknowledgment that "the remembrance of our sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable." And, oh! when we remember our manifold transgressions, the sins against light and love, the numberless times that we have grieved the Holy Spirit of God, the many unworthy returns we have made for all the goodness of the Lord, we have surely much cause to repent, and to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. True faith and godly sorrow for sin go hand in hand; the body and blood of Christ will ever be partaken of with the "bitter herbs" of repentance.

Again, the Paschal lamb was to be "eaten with unleavened bread." The meaning of this command is fully explained by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, "For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep

the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." "Leaven" is used in Scripture as an emblem of deceit and guile; thus, for instance, our Lord bids us beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." So that our reception of Christ as a Saviour must be a *heart* reception; the form of "godliness" must be accompanied with "the power." We must be real — earnest — sincere. Religion is to have a place below the surface. "The kingdom of God is within us." "A name to live" is not sufficient; we must be in very truth alive — our whole mind, and soul, and strength being fastened on the things which belong unto our peace. Oh, let us each remember that "God seeth not as man seeth," that God "searcheth the heart and weigheth the spirits," and that we cannot escape the scrutiny of His all-seeing eye. Oh, what profit is it to live in the profession of Christianity — to be regular in attendance upon ordinances — to be ready to join in benevolent enterprises, if we are not sanctified in will and affection, if we have not given ourselves up for "a habitation of God through the Spirit?" Oh, search your heart, and see whether "old things have passed away, and all things have become new." Yes, "all things." Whether you have new hopes, new tempers, new tastes, new affections,

new desires. Search and see whether you have "purged out the old leaven;" whether you are freed from passions which once enslaved you, and from habits which once bound you; and whether you are like a man who with his loins girt, and his lamp burning, is ready to leave Egypt, and at the call of God to enter upon the inheritance which is "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

For, lastly, the Paschal lamb was to be eaten by the Israelites with "their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands;" they were to "eat it in haste," as men prepared for a journey. Egypt was to be left at once; there was to be no delay; no tarrying; the flesh-pots, the leeks, the onions and garlic were all to be abandoned; and the Israelites were thenceforward to set their faces like a flint, and to follow whithersoever the Lord God would lead them. For what was Egypt with its firstborn doomed to death; Egypt so soon to be swept by the avenging wing of the destroyer,—what was this land of Egypt but a figure of the world as "it lieth in the wicked one," and is sunk in darkness and sin? The redemption of God's people, therefore, from this land of grovelling idolatry and slavish superstitions, this land where they were oppressed by cruel service and hard bondage, was the type of the redemption of the Church from the spiritual slavery and wicked-

ness,—the sinful appetites and fleshly desires which bear rule over the souls of men. As out of Egypt God called His sons in ancient days, so out of the world which Egypt symbolled does He call His children now. "He has redeemed us unto Himself to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works ; a people who are to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light." And just as God in His wisdom and goodness prepared the children of Israel by hardship and tribulation for their departure from Egypt —for without this stern discipline they would have been unwilling to leave its flesh-pots and coarse delights,—so does He now wean His people by sorrow, and trial, and tears, from the sinful pleasures of the world, and awaken them to nobler hopes and higher joys. Believe it, we should never withdraw our affections from the world if God did not by many a rude shock, and by many a sharp affliction, detach our hearts from the things of earth, and fasten them on purer delights, making us long for "the rest which remaineth for the people of God." Just as the oppression of their taskmasters caused the Hebrews to yearn after redemption from the house of bondage, so the afflictions of earth, and the sufferings of this present time, cause the Christian to long for deliverance from "the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." When wave after wave of trouble beats

against him, "deep calling unto deep," the storm and the tempest swelling high, then, thinking of the peace and calm that reigns within the Paradise above, he is constrained to cry out with the afflicted David, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest!" There is nothing like sorrow to make us feel that we are only "pilgrims and strangers" on earth, that "this is not our rest;" that "here we have no continuing city," and that like Israel we are to be as men who set their faces toward the promised land. And is there not cause to "come out and be separate" from the world;—the very same cause which Israel had to escape from Egypt? Was not Egypt doomed? And is not the world under a sentence of condemnation? "The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men."

Allusion has been made to the feelings of reverential fear which must have filled the hearts of the Israelites on the memorable night when the Destroyer was abroad, dealing out death to all the firstborn in Egypt. How must their very souls have been bowed with awe when they heard the rush of the angel's wing as he passed on his way over their own blood-marked doors, to cause weeping and destruction in the dwellings of the Egyptians! And when the voice of wailing rose in that awful

midnight, — when the "great cry" was heard through all the land of Egypt, the cry of mothers mourning over the lifeless bodies of their children, —when the truth was brought very near to them, that the "Lord is a God that taketh vengeance," —you may imagine how dread and solemn would be the feeling in the minds of one and all. Now do not the people of God hold the same relation to the world at large, as the Hebrews did to the Egyptians? When the Lord Jesus, "the Angel of the covenant," shall be revealed from heaven, shall it not be "to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?" True; we know not the day, nor the hour, when this shall be; but the judgment is not the less certain. "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." God has not said to His people, in such a night I will pass through the earth, and will smite it with a curse; and will "turn the wicked, and all the nations that forget me into hell." But He is not therefore "slack concerning His promise." He bids us to watch and to be always ready, for when men "shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." Oh, yes, there is coming a night more awful to the enemies of God than that when every household in the land of Egypt bewailed its dead,—a night more blessed

to the children of God than that in which Israel was delivered, — when the messengers of wrath shall be let loose against the wicked; but salvation, eternal salvation—salvation from every foe, from sin and Satan, from death and Hades, shall be the portion of the believing. Then shall the Lord's ransomed be delivered from all the enemies that oppressed them, and made their life weary and bitter with sore bondage, and soaring to meet their descending King, shall sing this song,—"This is the Lord, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is our God, we have waited for Him, we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation." And who are they that shall have confidence, yea, victory, yea, triumph, in "the great day of the Lamb's wrath?" They, and they only, who have the blood of the Lamb sprinkled on their souls, cleansing them from all sin. These shall be delivered from the world's condemnation. These shall have joy and gladness in this fearful season of terror and dismay. But, awful contrast! The man who is found by the Judge of Quick and Dead at His coming, unwashed from his guilt; who carries with him the plague-spot of unforgiven sin, he shall be only as a scabbard for the keen and polished sword of Divine anger. He shall be "driven from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." Oh, break off your sins at once, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel!"

Who knows how soon the Destroying Angel may receive his commission to "gather in the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God?" "The Son of man cometh in an hour when ye think not." Is the blood upon your door-posts? Has the lintel of your hearts been sprinkled with the precious drops which flowed from that sacred side which was wounded and pierced for our sins? If during the coming night, when silence is over the land, our sleep were to be broken by the wild shriek of terror and dismay which shall be wrung from all kindreds of the earth as they see the Son of man coming with clouds, would the mark of the blood be found on our consciences, and its peace and power be felt in our hearts? Unless it were so, you could not stand before Him; rather would you call on rocks and mountains to fall upon you and hide you from His presence. For how can ye escape, if, by neglecting or rejecting Christ, you use the blood of the spotless Lamb in the only manner in which the Israelites were *not to use it?* On the door-post and on the lintel the blood was to be sprinkled, but not on the threshold: for woe, woe unto the man who treads under foot the blood which was shed for sin! Yet this is just the thing which every impenitent sinner is doing. He is "treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of

grace." God in His mercy deliver you from such guilt! God in His great goodness give you grace to flee for salvation to that only Saviour whom, alas! so many reject and despise. Is it not only justice to say "reject" and "despise"? For passing by the worst of sinners, those who "make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof," how many live in continued disobedience to the Divine command concerning that holy ordinance appointed by Christ on the night on which He was betrayed! And is not this a virtual rejection of Christ? Think. Had the Israelites refused to eat of the Paschal feast on the night of their deliverance, would not that refusal have been a rejection of redemption, an act which insured the certainty of destruction? Not only was the blood of the lamb to be sprinkled on their door-posts, but the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten. To have disobeyed any part of God's ordinance would have vitiated the whole; the man that so sinned would have been cut off with the Egyptians. And how can he escape who, refusing to "eat of that bread and to drink of that cup by which we do show the Lord's death till He come," refuses obedience to the command, "Do this in remembrance of me"? Not that the Lord's Supper will save you. The Sacrament is not a converting ordinance, it is a strengthening. The Passover did not save Israel, it was simply a memorial of Israel's deliverance. So the bread

and wine are only memorials of redemption: but if you neglect the memorials, is it not to be feared that you neglect the redemption itself? Oh, be decided for God; give yourself unreservedly to Christ. Hearken to the call, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Though the chief of sinners, you may be saved by His blood. Take the sins which burden your conscience, and flee with them to Calvary. Leave them at the Cross. Cast your soul with all its guilt,—oh, cast it on Him who invites the burden, and says, "Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Night of Redemption.

"THY RIGHT HAND, O LORD, IS BECOME GLORIOUS IN POWER; THY RIGHT HAND, O LORD, HATH DASHED IN PIECES THE ENEMY."

"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea: and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left."—EXODUS XIV. 21, 22.

The Night of Redemption.

"The wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." There is no more remarkable illustration of this truth than that which is afforded in the history of Pharaoh. The opposition of the king of Egypt gave occasion for the manifestation of God's power. Nay, this Pharaoh, "who knew not Joseph," was brought to the throne for the very purpose of giving the Lord of the whole earth an opportunity of showing forth His glory." "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." Had Pharaoh been in a humble position in life, had he been given no sceptre to wield, no authority to exert, the rebellion of his proud heart would have attracted no attention; it would not have been brought out into prominent opposition to Jehovah's will. It was his rank and dignity which presented an opportunity for the exhibition

of God's wonder-working power in the redemption of His people. Had God's simple design been to deliver Israel out of Egypt, He could have removed Pharaoh from the throne; could have sent the wasting disease to consume him, or the pining sickness to bring him low; or winged the lightning with wrath, and bade it go forth on its errand of death; and thus by remote and secondary causes have brought him down to a premature grave. But the deliverance of Israel from the house of bondage was but a part of God's purpose; He designed over and above this to glorify His own name, and to make it evident to the whole world that He was God, and there was none else beside Him. Pharaoh was in His hand as the clay in the hand of the potter. There is something very awful in the stubborn resistance of Pharaoh to the Divine will. For, if it be said that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," it is also said that "Pharaoh hardened his own heart." When the hardening of his heart is referred to God, we are to understand only that God placed him in such circumstances that the hardness of his heart was called out into active and bold display. God did not make him wicked. Pharaoh was born with an evil nature, and, being left to his natural and unsubdued corruption, all that God did to subdue his stubborn will only brought out the opposition, and confirmed him in his sin. That his conscience at length

became seared as with a hot iron, was entirely his own fault. But why, you may ask, did God place him in a position which He knew would only strengthen the obstinacy of his character? Wherefore surround him with circumstances which would only stereotype him in sin? "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." The subject is confessedly mysterious; it belongs to the deep things of God. But, whatever of darkness surrounds it, the fact is certain, and the statement is made more than once, that Pharaoh was but an instrument used by God for His glory. Even after Israel had been delivered out of Egypt by a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, Pharaoh's pursuit of them is ascribed to the intervention of God. Mark how this truth is brought out in the narrative.

The Israelites had taken their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. Their road was direct; an open way of escape lay before them. But God did not permit them to take the shorter and more direct path. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn

and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. *For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.*" Moses acts in accordance with the command of God; and Pharaoh, rushing upon his own destruction, pursues after them, with all his horses, and chariots, and horsemen, and his army, and overtakes them in their place of encampment by the sea. The Israelites are sore afraid, as they behold the Egyptians marching after them, and in their turn they cry unto the Lord, and bitterly upbraid Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." But Moses, calm, resolute, and faithful, addresses them in the dauntless words, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you to-day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-

day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." The children of Israel are commanded by God to go forward, and Moses is bidden to lift up his rod, and stretch out his hand over the sea, and divide it, that the Hebrews may pass to the opposite shore on dry ground. And now approaches the end of the adversary, and the salvation of Israel. The night has come. Their last sun has set on Pharaoh and his host. Ere the morning breaks they will lie buried in a watery grave. The pillar of the cloud comes between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, shrouding the enemy in darkness, but flinging a bright light on the path of the people of God, as well as throwing a fiery lustre across the waters of the sea in their front. Moses stretches out his hand. The sea divides; the waves lift themselves up on high, and, like a wall of glass, the waters stand on either side while the Israelites march down into the dry bed of the channel. Pharaoh and his host presumptuously assay to do the same; but in the hour of the morning watch the Lord looks upon them through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and when, troubled by the vision, they would fain turn back again, the wheels of their chariots drive heavily, and refuse to aid their flight. Moses now stretches forth his rod once more; the waters return, and, rolling over Pharaoh

and his army, overwhelm them in the weltering waves. "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore." Most complete was the redemption which God wrought for His people. They were saved, with their flocks, and their herds, and their little ones; their cattle also went with them: the words which Moses spake in the ears of Pharaoh were fulfilled to the letter, and "not an hoof was left behind." The proud, cruel, and vainglorious enemy had said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them." Empty threat! The ransomed of the Lord, as they stood safe on the shore, triumphantly sang, "Thou, O Lord, didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" And Miriam, the prophetess, taking a timbrel in her hand, led a chorus of rejoicing women, who responded to the song of the men in such exulting strains as these, "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." And surely, as the notes of the melody rang amongst the wild hills, and mingled with the noise of the mighty waters beneath which

Pharaoh and his armies lay entombed, not a voice amongst the thousands of Israel but added its music to the anthem-peal, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy."

But let us consider some of the teachings which are contained in this "Night of Redemption."

And first, we see in the deliverance of the children of Israel from the hard service and the cruel tyranny of Egypt, a type of the redemption of God's people from the slavery of sin to freedom, — from "the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Man's natural state is one of slavish subjection to the things of time and sense, to fleshly appetites, and grovelling desires. "The whole world lieth in the Wicked One." "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin." "He that committeth sin is of the devil." Sad and terrible bondage! Oh, what a cruel taskmaster is Satan! Oh, what an inexorable tyrant is sin! No slavery so dreadful—no tyranny so relentless—no yoke so degrading. With a body shackled by the cruel fetters, bound hand and foot, or driven to the daily task by the cutting lash, the mind may still be free, and the soul, rising above the wrongs of earth, may for a while forget its misery in high communion with God. Leave a man a pure conscience, and trust in God, and the worst of trials may be met with bravery, and endured with pa-

tience, and hope may brighten the darkness of the present by pointing to the promise: "Our light affliction, which is but *for a moment*, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But the slavery of sin—the slavery in which the world, and the flesh, and the devil hold a man, what bondage can equal this? What servitude may be compared to this? And yet this slavery is the natural state of all men. It must be said of Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female—the highest and the lowest—the proudest and the poorest—the most lettered and the most ignorant, —"they are carnal, *sold* under sin." Whatever differences may exist between men in other respects, *here* there is none; in this one sad characteristic of our race all are sharers. Nor though they severally groan under their taskmasters, can they deliver themselves from the oppressors; they are neither willing nor able to strike the blow which can make them free. A Higher Power can alone destroy the chain, and call forth the desire for deliverance, breaking the rod of the tyrant and letting the prisoner go free. It requires a greater than Moses to redeem His chosen people from the house of bondage, to save them from the hands of their enemies, to burst the accursed bonds of sin, and to bring them into the full and glorious liberty of the children of God. And this freedom, of which the redemption from Egypt was but a

symbol, has been achieved for His elect by Him of whom Moses was but a type—by Him "who died for our sins and was raised for our justification." For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." A harder task His than that of Moses. The leader and lawgiver of Israel had but to deliver God's message in the ears of Pharaoh, to take the rod and stretch forth his hand, and call down the plague upon Egypt, turning the waters into blood, and bringing the fire and hail from heaven. But "the Captain of our salvation" saved us, not by revealing the truth, not by displaying His power, and confounding the enemy by the tokens of His majesty, but by dying in our stead on the cross. "He was slain, and redeemed us to God by His blood." It was as our substitute that He was nailed to the accursed tree, and poured forth His soul unto death. "Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." It was "on the cross that He spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them." And having died, He went down into the grave, that he might undergo the whole curse denounced against sin, and, at the same time, prove Himself victor over the grave. By the hands of holy men and loving women His sacred body was wound in linen clothes, with spices, and carried to the new sepulchre hewn out in the rock. There He lay His appointed time,

resting in the chambers of death; but when the third morning shed its light over the earth, He stirred in His shroud, cast off His grave-clothes, and came forth as "the resurrection and the life." And the blessed thing for us in the victory achieved by the Redeemer over the powers of death and Hades is just this, that in Him we overcome these foes, and are "made more than conquerors" over every enemy of our peace. He obeyed, and died, and went down to the darksome tomb as the Head and Representative of His Church—as the Substitute and Surety of a covenant people, who in due time shall follow Him—"the Forerunner"—within the veil, and be gathered with Him "into the heavenly places not made with hands."

Addressing His people, He says: "Because I live, ye shall live also." "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The Shepherd of the flock is pledged to bring them safely to the shores of the heavenly Canaan. Many are their enemies: sin, the world, the devil, wicked spirits in high places. All these pursue them steadily, and would fain cause them to "make shipwreck of the faith." The whole life of the believer is a scene of hard conflict. From the time of his escape out of Egypt until the moment that he is about to enter heaven, he has to battle manfully against indwelling corruption, and the fierce temp-

tations of Satan. The good fight of faith is to be fought out to the end. There is no discharge from this warfare. Like the soldier who dies in harness, all his armour buckled on, and his powers gathered up for a last encounter, the Christian expires sword in hand, grasping the shield of faith, and clasping the breast-plate of righteousness, and with the helmet of salvation laced on his head; for even on his death-bed he has to stand at guard against the relentless foe. But though he has a hard fight, he shall have a brilliant victory; and leaning on his Saviour's arm, and trusting in His all-sufficient grace, and in that strength which is made perfect in our weakness, he shall exclaim with his dying breath, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord!" The enemy can follow him to the brink of the river of death, but no farther. The Christian warrior will look back from the happy shores of heaven, and bid defiance to his malice; for death divides him from all who could oppress, or harass, or annoy, and through its deep waters he has marched onward to security and peace. And as it is with the individual Christian, so shall it be with the collective Church of Christ. The members of that elect and ransomed Church shall be delivered from all their enemies — shall be rescued from death and the grave; and rising to the life immortal, shall be glorified with Christ in "the kingdom prepared for

the righteous from the beginning of the world." "The Egyptians"—the adversaries who opposed them—"they shall see them no more for ever;" nothing that can hurt, or destroy, or defile shall be permitted to enter "the inheritance of the saints in light." And then, too, "when the elect shall be gathered from the four winds," and "the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints," and the members of the body are united to their glorified Head, it shall be found that "not a hoof was left behind."

Death and Hades shall give up the dead that are in them. From crowded city and green churchyard—from lonely glen, and solitary mountain, and depths of ocean, shall the saints arise; and clothed with beauty as with a garment, and outnumbering the stars of heaven, shall surround their Redeemer with songs of grateful and adoring praise. And "thus made more than conquerors through Him that loved them," well will it become them to sing the triumphant song of Israel, when standing safe on the desired shore, they assembled round their Leader and Deliverer, and made the heavens ring with their voices, as they said, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy!"

Other lessons still remain to be gathered from this "Night of Redemption." In the tenth chapter

of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul alludes to the passage through the Red Sea: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." All Israel went down into the bed of the divided sea, and entered by the act of such immersion into a solemn covenant with God, and coming up from the channel where the waters usually flowed, was acknowledged as the Church of God under the Old Testament dispensation. So we Gentiles, passing under the waters of baptism, enter into a solemn covenant with God, and are received into the Christian Church, as established by the only-begotten Son. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of God the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Just as from the darkness of their descent into the hollowed channel of the sea the Israelites were raised up in triumph, the depths of the sea being made "a way for the ransomed to pass over," so are we who are "buried with Christ by baptism into death" to "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Just as the Israelites, by the

very act of passing through the Red Sea, left Egypt and its slavery, its flesh-pots, and carnal dainties behind them for ever, and were about to enter on a new, and higher, and happier life, so should we, by the very act of our baptism into Christ, bid an eternal farewell to the bondage of sin in which we were naturally held, and "put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts of the flesh, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." For to use the Apostle's imagery, we are "buried with Christ by baptism into death." As members of Christ through faith, we have not only been crucified with Him on the cross, but also buried with Him in the sepulchre where He was laid when He was taken down dead from the accursed tree. Of this solemn entombment baptism is a figure. The going down into its waters represents our death unto sin, "for he that is dead is freed from sin;" our coming up again from the cold stream is the striking symbol of our entrance on a life altogether new, — higher, purer, holier than the old.

How much higher who may say, when we remember that from the hour of our spiritual regeneration we are in a true, though most mysterious sense, "risen with Christ," and "made to sit together in heavenly places in Him;" and that we possess the very seed and germ of immortality;

for being one with Him who is "alive for evermore," we can never die? And this spiritual resurrection from the death of sin now, ensures the bodily resurrection from the death of the grave hereafter. Hear the Apostle: "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Blessed be our God for this assurance! "If we carry within ourselves," as we do, "the sentence of death," we also carry within ourselves the earnest of a resurrection unto life. The Spirit of the living God is within us. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" The resurrection in all its heavenliness has already commenced in the believing soul, and we are persuaded that the body to which it has been wedded shall also partake of a glorious transformation in the day of the Lord's appearing, when the corruptible shall put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality. So that each twice-born man may make the words of the prophet his own, and say,—"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

But let it here be plainly understood that these

privileges belong to those only who, being baptized with the Holy Ghost, have been renewed in the spirit of their minds. They are not the portion of all the baptized. "For though baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but is also a sign of regeneration or new birth;" yet the sign is not always or necessarily connected with the thing signified. In proof of this, you need only be reminded that the circumcision of the flesh was not always accompanied by circumcision of the heart.

Just as of old "all were not Israel who were of Israel," so now, all are not Christ's who call themselves Christians. Mark you. How blest was that multitude who were saved by "the sprinkling of blood" from the destruction that befell the Egyptians, and who passed through the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, when "the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." "All our fathers," as St. Paul states, "were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." And yet notwithstanding their high privileges, observe what

the Apostle immediately adds: "But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." "They lusted after evil things;" "they murmured;" they "fell into idolatry;" they "committed fornication;" they "tempted Christ," and therefore they entered not into Canaan; they did not inherit the promised blessing. "Now these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." It is not the ordinance of baptism that will save us. It is indeed a high and holy privilege; but we must not rest contented with the external rite. Nay, it brings with it a solemn responsibility; and will only increase the condemnation of him who "counts the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and does despite unto the Spirit of grace." You have been born in a Christian land,—have been baptized with Christian baptism, and admitted to Christian privileges and to Christian blessings. You can never be as the heathen: you cannot pass into the position of one who has not heard of Christ, or been told the way of salvation. You may live as the heathen, and die as the heathen, but you will not be judged as the heathen. Born where the Gospel shines, where Bibles abound, and Christian ordinances are multiplied, no power on earth can ever sweep away the distinction be-

tween you and the men of a country who have had no opportunity of knowing the truth. And if this be true, what a solemn thing it is,—how charged with the most tremendous consequences,—to have your lot cast in a Christian country, and to be the member of a Christian Church. Better, immeasurably better, not to have had these advantages, than to have had them, and not improved them! Privileges unimproved will only aggravate condemnation; will become as millstones round the neck, dragging down to a lower depth in the black abyss of hell. "He that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." "Many stripes!" "Many stripes!" Oh, take heed; for the love of God; for the sake of your soul take heed that your privileges do not become your direct curses instead of your richest blessings. Consider these things. See to it that "the things that should be for your health, be not unto you an occasion of falling." Remember that awful judgment upon Capernaum: "And thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven,"—exalted by privileges, by mercies, by the preaching of Christ,—"shalt be brought down to hell." And let every half-hearted false professor, let every despiser of the Gospel, every one who "neglects the great salvation," tremble at the words, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

There is a remarkable allusion to the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and to the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts, in the fifteenth chapter of the Revelation. It is there stated of those saints who "stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire," and who have "the harps of God," that they "sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

It is very observable, that it is "the song of Moses" to which the glorified saints will strike their golden harps. Now that song was not only one of thanksgiving to the Lord, but exultation over the wicked,—rejoicing over their destruction in the waters. Hearken to the lofty chant of praise that was heard on the Red Sea shore when the Egyptians were buried in its waves,—"The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name: Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea: the depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone." "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea!" And of a similar nature is to be the song of the saints. They are to sing not alone "the song of the Lamb," chanting the praises of Him who "was slain, and redeemed us unto God by His blood,"

but "the song of Moses," commemorating how the Lord had beaten down His foes. Is it not mysterious? Is it not inscrutable? What? Shall the saints not only acquiesce in the destruction of the wicked, but actually find material of thankfulness and praise in that destruction, magnifying God for the vindication of His attributes? Even so. With our present sensibilities and affections, this is quite incomprehensible; tears, and not songs, we think, should be called forth by the punishment of the lost. And so, indeed, it should be now. "Rivers of water should run down our eyes for those that keep not God's law." We should speak "even weeping of those who are enemies of the cross of Christ." "With tears we should warn them night and day," to "flee from the wrath to come."

But hereafter! — Oh! nothing so tells me how vast the change which shall have passed over our feelings when "God" will be "all in all," than the fact that we shall "rejoice when we see the vengeance," and sing in acknowledgment of the equity and the truth of all the dealings of Jehovah, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." So "swallowed up in God" shall we be: so deep, and engrossing, and all-absorbing shall be our love of the Almighty: our minds and wills shall so harmonize with His, that we shall exult in whatever brings honour to His name.

But you may say, "Suppose a kinsman be found in the ranks of the lost?" "Suppose a parent should be there? A child? One whom we loved as our own soul?" It is an awful thought. We must bow our heads in silence. We tremble at the mystery. We must do what the elders are said to do when they behold the ascending smoke of eternal torments, and cry, "Alleluia," "they fall down and worship God." But if such things be true, how earnest ought we to be not only about our own salvation, but the salvation of those dear to us? Oh, give yourself unto the Lord, and try to win those dear to you to His service. God grant that we and all whom we love may be able to stand in the judgment, acknowledged there as those who have been not only "hearers, but doers also of the Word."

To this end we must place our faith and hope in Christ; and "look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Justified by His blood, sanctified by His Spirit, and "giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure," we shall welcome the Day of Resurrection with the exclamation, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Yes, in that day shall this song be sung,—"Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy

name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee: for thy judgments are made manifest." "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen."

CHAPTER IX.

The Night of Gideon's Call.

"I WILL BE AS THE DEW UNTO ISRAEL."

"And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground."—JUDGES VI. 40.

The Night of Gideon's Call.

From Joshua's death, through the long period of Israel's government by judges, the history of the chosen nation presents to our contemplation the humiliating recurrence of sin and judgment. Each succeeding age was but a repetition of the one preceding. Events moved in a circle. For three hundred years the record of this people's story may be summed up in the following words :—Sin visited by chastisement; chastisement leading to repentance; repentance followed by the Divine forgiveness, and a release from the punishment which their guilt had provoked; and this continuing until fresh sin called forth a fresh manifestation of God's anger.

We read in the closing words of the fifth chapter of this book, this statement: "The land had rest forty years;" and it is written in the opening verse of chapter six: "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." Hardly has the trium-

phant song of Deborah and Barak for victory won at "that ancient river, the river Kishon," ceased to echo in the ear, when we read again of Israel's sin and its attendant chastisement. "They did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years." Bitter was their affliction. "The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, the caves, and strongholds." Nor did the terror of the enemy stop here. "And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle, and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites." This sore judgment has its designed effect. It humbles the people before God. It wrings from them the prayer for mercy. "The children of Israel cried unto the Lord."

When the punishment has borne the desired fruits, God, who "will not keep His anger for

ever," and who "delighteth in mercy," listens to the cry of His suffering people, and sends to them His prophet to remind them of His gracious deliverance on their behalf in days of old, and of their ungrateful return for His lovingkindness. But God is not content with merely bringing their sins to remembrance. He raises up an instrument in the person of His servant Gideon, who shall deliver them out of the hand of their enemies. As Gideon threshes wheat by the wine-press in Ophrah, to hide it from the Midianites, an angel of the Lord appears to him, and hails him with the salutation, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Gideon, seeing in the inroads of the enemy a proof that God is against His people, asks in mingled surprise and sorrow, "Oh, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." In answer to these questions, "the Lord looks upon him," and says, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

Let us pause for a moment or two here, that we may gather up a lesson of instruction.

Gideon's question, "If the Lord be with us, why

then is all this befallen us?" showed his ignorance of God's merciful design in afflicting His people. He judged according to sense, not according to righteous judgment. He regards the sorrows which God had brought upon His nation as signs that the favour of the Lord was entirely withdrawn.

How prone all of us are to fall into the same mistake! This was the very error of the friends of Job, when they looked on the trials of that righteous man as tokens of the Almighty's displeasure. But we are not to estimate God's favour by times of prosperity and blessing alone. We are to see proofs of His love in seasons of tribulation and trouble as well. "As many as I love I rebuke and chastise." For wherefore the defeat and disaster that had befallen Israel? Why was it that the enemy was permitted to oppress them, and to be as thorns and briars in their side? Because God in His great mercy would not deliver them over to their sins, nor suffer them to pursue a career which could only end in their utter separation from Himself. He wished to turn them back from the error of their ways. A far surer token of His anger would have been to have "let them alone;" to have sent them neither correction nor reproof, but have permitted them to rush, unchecked and unrestrained, to their own ruin. It was because "He was with them" that all this had befallen them. It is of the wicked that it is

said, "They are not in trouble like other folk; neither are they plagued like other men." Better, a thousand times better, that Israel should be defeated by the Midianites, and driven into dens and caves, and be robbed of the produce of their fields—their corn and wine, than that they should go on adding sin to sin without any check or curb, and so be left to "eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

To my thinking, some of the most solemn words in the Bible are those addressed to Israel of old. "So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, *and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry.*"

If God's voice, as He speaks to us in the tones of angry displeasure, be awful, His silence is at times more awful still. Better to hear Him speak in the loud thunder of His remonstrance and rebuke, than not to hear Him speak at all. Better, a thousand times better, that we should smart under the rod; that we should be visited with trial; that sorrows should be mingled with our cup, than that we should be allowed to follow the devices and desires of our own hearts; no strong but tender hand restraining us in our downward course—God fulfilling His awful threat—"My jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry." "It is a good sign," says Bishop Hall, "when God chides us. His round reprehensions

are ever gracious forerunners of mercy; whereas His silent connivance at the wicked argues deep and secret displeasure." Truly, our prayer ought to be that of the Prophet, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing."

Let us pause over another point in the narrative. When Gideon expressed his fears that the Lord had forsaken the Israelites, and had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, it is written, "The Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

"The Lord looked upon him." In that "look" what grace, what power, what strength! We all of us know how much there is in "a look." In times of anxiety or peril,—when, for instance, in a storm at sea the ship struggles with the raging waves, which every instant threaten to send her down amid the whirling billows, how reassuring to see the quiet confidence seated on the pilot's brow as he steers the vessel through the roaring waters. Or, amid the rush and roar of battle, when the ranks are thinned, and brave men fall at every volley of the enemy, and the fortunes of the fight seem to go against those who for a season thought the day their own, how it cheers the heart to catch the calm assurance that lights up the general's eye, and foretells of victory. Or, again, when sickness

threatens the life of one we love, and he struggles in the arms of death, and we grow sick through fear of a lot which would leave the world a blank, —how it restores the crushed-out hope to witness the untroubled confidence of the physician's glance, as he bids us banish fear, and speaks of health restored. Yes, there is much in "a look," and the Lord's "look" must have thrilled to the heart of Gideon, and filled it with confiding trust. And let the Lord "look" on you, my brother, and do you catch, through faith, the glance of His approving eye, and there is no duty for which you shall not prove equal—no danger in which you shall not overcome.

"Gideon's might." What was this? Jehovah's presence. God was his shield and buckler. Weak in himself, he was strong in the Lord and in "the power of His might." With God on his side, he might look an army in the face, and say with one in after days, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." The Presence of the Lord has ever been the strength of His saints. This upholding them, they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." And is not the same Presence our

"might in that battle which as Christians we are pledged to wage with all our spiritual foes? It is the belief that God is on our side that nerves us for the conflict. Often would the hands hang down, and the knees fail, did we not know that God was with us, that the armour in which we are clad is "the armour of God;" that He "teaches our hands to war, and our fingers to fight," and that He has promised that we shall come out from the hard-fought fight "more than conquerors." Here I say, look at Paul. This man, who often spoke of his infirmities, who affirmed that he had "no sufficiency of himself to think anything as of himself:" who said once and again that he walked among his converts "in weakness, and in much trembling," yet could take into his mouth such bold and confident language as this: "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." "All things." Faith gave him an omnipotent power, for "all things are possible to him that believeth." "Through Christ"—the whole mystery of the Apostle's strength is gathered up into these two words.

My brother, go forth to the long, hard struggle of life, "in this thy might." We have each our own battle to fight, as the heart well knoweth, and no other can fight it for us. The circumstances of the conflict may vary, but conflict there is for all. Some have to wrestle with fiery passions; others

with subtle doubts; some with hot and irritable tempers; and others again with a proud or supercilious mind, and many with a worldly, pleasure-loving, selfish, and self-seeking heart. There are enemies within and without — all around us — in our own flesh and blood; in principalities and powers, in the rulers of the darkness of this world, and in the spiritual wickednesses in high places." And times there are when the struggle seems too great for our strength; when our strife appears beyond endurance, and the temptation comes against us armed with a power that almost defies resistance. What is to be done now? Where are we to turn for aid? Listen to David: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Cast yourself on God. Meet the temptations, not in thine own strength, but His. Let the ear of faith catch the promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness." God will, with the temptation, make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Fight in His strength, and not only will you be able to "stand fast in the evil day," but to come forth a victor from the struggle. Oh, be not cast down. If His grace were less sufficient, if His love were less infinite; if his strength ever failed; if there were any stain which the blood of Christ could not wash out; if anything were

too hard for the Lord, then all of us might despond, and throw up the battle in despair. But He that summons us to the warfare will supply the grace needed for the victory. Child of God, be strong and of a good courage; that same mighty Being is on your side who sustained the failing courage of Gideon by such gracious words as these: "Go IN THIS THY MIGHT, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

Gideon now looks for a sign to assure him that all this is reality, no waking dream or vision that may vanish, and leave him uncertain whether God has been with him or no. "If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me." He also prays to be allowed to offer Him a direct act of worship. "Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present (or meat offering), and set it before thee." His request is granted. "I will tarry till thou come again," is the gracious reply. When Gideon returns, and the meat-offering is prepared, the angel of the Lord touches the flesh and the unleavened cakes with the end of his staff, and fire rising out of the rock consumes the oblation. The angel vanishes from his sight. Gideon, struck with awe, exclaims, "Alas, O Lord God! for

because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." But the Lord reassures him. "Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." Then Gideon builds an altar unto the Lord, and calls it Jehovah-shalom: that is, "The Lord shall send peace."

No angel or seraph this whom Gideon worships; God Himself is here. The meat-offering presented and accepted; the fire breaking from a rock; the altar built and the name given to it, reveal God's own presence. In this angel we see "the Messenger of the covenant." It is the same mighty Being who talked with Abraham, wrestled with Jacob, appeared to Moses, met Joshua as the captain of the Lord's host, and ascended to heaven in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice. It is none other than Christ Himself; for as "no man hath seen God at any time," this must have been the Second Person in the ever blessed Trinity, who from time to time anticipated His incarnation, that He might comfort and encourage His people in the days of old.

Beautiful name to give to the altar builded to the Lord, "Jehovah-shalom!" Blessed as beautiful! "The Lord shall send peace." God,—is He not called "the God of peace?" Christ,—is He not styled "the Prince of Peace?" And was not "the counsel of peace between them both?" Christ is "our peace." "Peace" was the last rich legacy He left to His Church. "Peace I

leave with you: my peace I give unto you." And to have peace flowing from the consciousness of sin forgiven; to have "peace" in the midst of trial,—"peace" in danger,—"peace" in death, is surely a great and unspeakable blessing. What a promise! "Thy peace shall flow like a river." What an assurance! "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in thee, because he trusteth in thee." May you and I know Christ under the character of "our peace!" May our family altar be reared in His name, and be hallowed by His presence; and for us may the promise which lies couched under the beautiful title, "Jehovah-shalom," be fulfilled, "The Lord shall send peace."

Gideon being prepared for service, and having been taught the source of his strength, is bidden by God to begin the work of reformation at home, to throw down the altar of Baal in his father's house, and to set up the altar of God in its place. Before he proceeds against the Midianites, he is to destroy a worse foe in his own family, and demolish the idols that had been set up by his own kith and kin. May we not learn from this that zeal for God is to begin at home, and that we are to clean heart and household of sin before we wage war against the sins of others, or attack the enemies of God that lie beyond our own domestic circle?

Gideon at once obeys, and under cover of the

night casts down the altar of Baal, and cuts down the grove. This righteous conduct immediately excites indignation and anger. The men of the city clamour for Gideon's death. "Bring out thy son," they cry unto Joash, "that he may die." Joash replies in words unanswerable because of their truth. The argument is winged with sarcastic force. "Will ye plead for Baal? Will ye save him? He that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar." These words of common sense commend themselves to the people: and though the enemy, Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the east league themselves against Israel, and pitch in the valley of Jezreel, yet, when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon, and he blows a blast upon his trumpet, all Abi-ezer "is gathered after him." The very men of the city, whom he had feared as his opponents, and who had demanded his death, now tender him their allegiance, and as one man attach themselves to his banner. And not only does God make his enemies to be at peace with him, but the messengers whom Gideon sends throughout all Manasseh, and those whom he sends unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali, are welcomed; and the summons to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty, is cheerfully obeyed. Israel

responds nobly to the chieftain's call, and rising up with patriotic ardour, resolves to break the yoke of the Midianites, and to achieve a glorious freedom. As the news flies through the land, there is a mustering of tribes and a gathering of forces; and hurrying from lowly valley and crowded city, from shepherd's hut and peasant's tent, the thousands of Israel hasten forth to join Gideon's standard, and to jeopard their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

'Tis the eve of battle. Israel's freedom will be decided by to-morrow's struggle. It is a night of much anxiety for him who is to lead the hosts to the fight. Gideon feels it to be so, and he implores God to give him a token that the people shall be saved by his hand.

Shall we say that this desire for further confirmation of success was an evidence of a weak and doubting faith? It may have been. But let us not judge the Lord's servant too severely. Great interests were at stake. The issue of the next day's battle would decide the question of Israel's deliverance, or their continued subjection to the enemy. Their liberty of returning to the worship of the God of their fathers, or their oppression under the heel of the idolator, hung upon the coming fight. Gideon would therefore make assurance doubly sure, and asked for another sign from heaven. "And Gideon said, If thou

wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground."

Behold the grace and goodness of God in granting the double sign which Gideon prayed for, and His suspending the very laws of nature, that His servant might be emboldened for the conflict on the morrow.

. Is there not for us here rich encouragement to pray without ceasing? We are not, indeed, either to ask or expect a sign from heaven for the confirmation of our faith. The visible interpositions of God which were needed in days of less light to strengthen the hearts of the saints, are not needed or vouchsafed under the clearer dispensation of the Spirit. It is also a much higher requirement to walk by faith than to walk by sight, and to this

privilege we are now invited, with the added encouragement, given us in the words of the Lord, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." This is now our high position. To honour God by an undoubting trust, to make His Word the ground of all our hopes, and to commit ourselves into His hand, as unto a faithful Creator.

What more can we want than the promises of that Book, which are "all yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us"? What more can we ask for than the clear light of the Holy Spirit's teaching thrown on all its statements to illuminate their lessons, and to make them flash with meaning to our heart! Thank God for that word which "He has magnified above all His name," and which is "a lamp unto the feet," and "a light unto the path" of all them who look to it for guidance and instruction.

Various spiritual meanings have been attached to the two opposite signs vouchsafed to Gideon—to the fleece moistened with dew, when it was dry upon all the earth besides; to the ground wet with moisture, when the fleece only was dry.

There is often a good deal of straining in the attempt to extract hidden meanings from the sacred word, and I shall therefore only call your attention to two of the most obvious applications of this passage.

The Jewish nation presents us with the first analogy to the signs vouchsafed to Gideon. When, in the midst of a world which lay in the Wicked One, the Israelites were the depositaries of divine truth, and alone had the knowledge of God, they may be said to have been like the fleece of Gideon, watered by the dew of heaven, whilst it was "dry upon all the earth beside." Again, when "rejecting the council of God against themselves," they fell away through unbelief, and their privileges—taken away from them in judgment—were bestowed upon the Gentiles, they may be said to have been like the fleece of Gideon, which was dry when there was dew on all the ground. Whether or no this truth was prefigured under the miracle granted to the mighty man of valour, the analogy is sufficiently ample and plain.

The second lesson suggested by the same sign is one which is solemnly applicable to ourselves personally.

You are aware that the action of the Holy Spirit on the soul is often likened in Scripture to the drops of the refreshing shower, or the moisture of the early dew upon the parched and withering ground. "I will be as the dew unto Israel," is the promise of God to His people. In that beautiful Psalm, the seventy-second, which predicts the glory and majesty of Messiah's kingdom, it is said, not only of His personal presence with His saints, but of His

influence over them in the power of the Spirit, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth." Again, it is thus written in Hosea, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning: and He shall come unto us (in the presence and power of the Spirit) as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

Has He so come to you, my brother? Has He come down with refreshing grace into your heart? The dews of the Spirit are falling on many and many a soul; are they descending with grace and mercy upon yours? Have you felt their quickening, reviving power? If not, how sad your state! Others have been watered, like Gideon's fleece, with the dew of heaven, whilst you continue dry, and parched, and barren. Oh, to think that numbers all around have been visited with "showers of blessing," and that you know nothing of the cleansing, healing, sanctifying influence of that Spirit who is the earnest, the first-fruits, the foretaste of the eternal life of heaven! Fit matter for mourning, and lamentation, and woe; for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And why should the dews of heaven descend on other souls, and not on yours? Are ye "grieving the Spirit" by your carelessness, or folly, or worldliness, or sin? Are ye "quenching

the Spirit" by resisting His striving with conscience through the Word, through ordinances, through Providence? Have you ever sought the Spirit in prayer, asking from the Giver this His most precious gift?

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living waters." So Christ, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, said to the Samaritan woman: so He says to you. The living water is the Holy Spirit of God. Ask Jesus for this water, and He will not send you empty away. Yea, the water that He shall give you, shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Put His promises to the test, and see if He will not "open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it,"—"the rich, abundant, refreshing showers of divine and life-imparting grace. Oh, what encouragement in the words, "If we being evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

What blessings would fall upon our land—what waters would break forth in the wilderness; what streams in the desert; how would the parched ground become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water, were every member in our congregations

to lift up suppliant hands, and reverent hearts to heaven, in the words of our Christian hymn :—

> " Dear Saviour, hear us when we call,
> To wrestling prayer an answer give ;
> Pour down Thy dew upon us all,
> That all may feel, and all may live."

" Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down ! "

CHAPTER X.

The Night of Victory.

"NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS."

"And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand."—JUDGES VII. 9.

The Night of Victory.

The sign had been given for which Gideon asked, in order to be assured that Israel should be saved by his hand. The fleece placed on the floor at night was wet in the morning with dew, although it was "dry upon all the ground beside." Again, the fleece placed on the floor at night was dry in the morning, when there was dew on all the ground. In the strength of this twofold token of success Gideon puts himself at the head of his troops, and pitches his tent by the well of Harod. Taking up this position, he has the host of the Midianites on the north side of his forces, by the hill Moreh, in the valley. Thirty-two thousand men are enlisted under his banner. The army marshalled against him and his men of war is an almost countless host, composed of "the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the East." The two hosts seem most unequally matched. Israel looks but a handful, when measured against the con-

fronting foe. Judging according to all appearances, the victory hangs in no doubtful balance; and when the fire shall fly from clashing swords, and spears shall shiver on opposing shields, and the air shall resound with the din of arms, and blood shall stream from gaping wounds, it can hardly fail but that the overwhelming numbers of the enemy will carry the tide of battle in their favour. And yet, while the Israelites doubtless think they are too few to meet an enemy whose numbers are so countless, God says to His servant Gideon, "The people are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." As God determined to deliver Israel by His own immediate power, and as He will not give His honour to another, the ranks of Gideon's army must be thinned. God will not permit Israel to vaunt themselves against Him, saying, "Mine own arm hath saved me."

This has always been His method of acting. It was before the blast of rams' horns that the walls of Jericho fell prostrate in the dust. It was with a stone and a sling that the stripling shepherd smote to the ground the giant champion of the Philistines. It is all one with God to "save by many or by few;" but He rather chooses to save by few, that all the glory may redound to Himself. Gideon is therefore directed to go and proclaim in the ears of the people, and to say, "Whosoever is

fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead." The result of this proclamation was that twenty and two thousand of the people returned, and only ten thousand remained. The larger number proved themselves timid and cowardly, strong in profession, but weak in action; making a fair show when the danger was still at a distance, and shrinking back when the peril drew nigh. God will have no faint hearts in His service; and so He commands the faltering and the wavering to return, and leave the field.

So is it, also, amongst the armies of the Cross. The men wanted to recruit the ranks are brave soldiers, who will "endure hardship," and fight a good fight. Those who would enlist under the banner of "the Captain of our salvation" must first "sit down and count the cost." The warfare in which we are engaged requires men of faith and self-denial and prayer, who will "resist unto blood, striving against sin," and who are ready to go forth without the camp unto Jesus, "bearing His reproach." Remember the conflict to which we are summoned. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." To duty and to difficulty is every Christian called; to the mortification of the flesh, the keeping under the body, the plucking out the offending right eye,

the cutting off the offending right hand. How stirring are the words of St. Paul, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." "Quit you like men." Christianity requires men, valiant men, men mighty to do and strong to suffer in the cause of God and of truth. Come, let us reason together. Have we been induced to confess ourselves Christ's because we think "the offence of the Cross has ceased?" Do we look upon religion as a holiday thing — a thing which may be lightly taken up, and as lightly laid down? Have we, like too many, been induced to make a Christian profession, with little or anything like an adequate or serious sense of what so solemn a pledge implies? Have we enlisted in the ranks of the Cross in a fit of transient enthusiasm, and do we now remain in camp only because we are ashamed to draw back? Alas! there is a great deal of what is called religion amongst us that would not stand in a day of trial, were such a day to come. There are many who appear to "receive the Word with joy," who "in time of temptation fall away." Do we not read of some who joined our Lord's little band of followers, that they "went back, and walked no more with Him?" Do we not know that "Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present world?" and that many others, who seemed to be faithful at first, left him alone, and became apostates from the

faith? Oh! if sifting times were to come, it is to be feared that many who "profess and call themselves Christians" would not pass the ordeal, but would fall away. Are you such a half-hearted professor? If so, the Lord needs no such aid as yours for any purpose of His; His own zeal will perform it. If you are lukewarm or indifferent, treacherous or false; if you have only joined the standard on compulsion, or to serve a purpose; if you are secretly ashamed of Christ, and ready to deny Him at the first temptation, then back, back to the world; you are not a fit soldier to fight in the conquering armies of the Cross! Are not the "fearful" ranked with "the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, who have their part in the lake of fire?" In your ears, therefore, may be sounded Gideon's proclamation, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart."

When the columns of Gideon's army have been thinned by this sifting process, only ten thousand troops remain to do battle with the enemy. Must not Israel fear, when this large number has failed them and left their ranks, that their hopes of victory are but small? Yet God still complains that the people "are too many," and He appoints a test whereby that chosen band of brothers shall be known, who shall go forth with Gideon to con-

quest and triumph. As the men march along, Gideon brings them down to a stream of water where they may quench their thirst. "Every one," said the Lord, "that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place."

Whether there was anything in the appointed trial itself to distinguish between those who were to follow Gideon's standard, and those who were to return, is not to be determined from the narrative. Some have seen in the manner in which the men drank of the stream an evidence of their fitness or unfitness for the battle. For as the countenance and demeanour are often an index to the mind within, so they have thought that "the indolence of the weak, and the fears of the timid, were betrayed by the very act of the men's bowing down upon their knees to drink." On the other hand, they have seen a patience, and resolution, and an earnestness for the work which lay before them, and which would not allow them to slacken

for a moment their onward march, in the mere dipping of their hands into the stream by the three hundred, and "the hastily lifting up to their parched mouths the few drops of moisture which they retained" within their palms. Be this as it may, or whether the test and its result be not better simply referred to the appointment of Him who "doeth all things well," we are sure that the Lord only selected those who would prove the ablest champions of His cause. A lesson for our encouragement may be drawn from this—a lesson of encouragement for all who being made "willing in the day of God's power," have, as faithful volunteers, joined the standard of the cross, and are fighting in the Lord's service. If God has called you to any task, office, or ministry—if He has allotted to you some duty, whether as a public officer, or as a private member of the Church, the very choice argues that He finds in you, or rather that He has imparted to you, that measure of strength which is equal to the post assigned you. It must comfort us in our strife with sin—in our endeavour to advance our Master's honour—in taking upon us some service of love and labour, to know, that if God did not see us fit for the duty, He would not have honoured us with the employment.

Gideon, lest he should be discouraged by the smallness of his army, now receives through the

goodness of God a further confirmation of success. "Arise, get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it into thine hand." And lest with strength so feeble and enemies so mighty he should fear to go down, he is bidden to take his servant Phurah with him, and to approach the borders of the Midianitish camp. There, what a mighty host is assembled! "The Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the children of the East, lie along in the valley, like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels are without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude." As he moves near the enemy's camp, Gideon hears one of the soldiers speaking to his comrade, telling of a dream which he had dreamed, and receiving from him the interpretation:—"Behold, I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all the host."

We have here a remarkable instance of the Providence of God. He not alone provides that one Midianite shall have a dream, and that another shall declare its meaning, but that Gideon shall overhear the interpretation. These three links in the chain were all needed for the confirmation of

Gideon's hopes, and the three links were all supplied.

Observe how God orders everything for His people's good! Out of the mouth of an enemy comes the assurance of Gideon's victory. See how the Providence of God extends to the most common, minute, and apparently trivial occurrences—how even the dream of one soldier, and its interpretation by another, are made to work together for the good of them that love Him. That there is no such thing as chance—that God guides and governs the world, and all things therein — that nothing is beyond His control or beneath His notice, is a happy thought, not to be parted with for thousands of silver and gold. Child of God! let the belief that your Heavenly Father watches over your fortunes, guards your welfare, and guides your way, inspire you with confidence and banish every care. What should discourage you? What should disturb you? What should ruffle the spirit of a man who knows that He who has numbered the stars of heaven has numbered the hairs of his head? What should disquiet him who knows that God has "given His angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways, to bear him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone?"

Gideon had no sooner heard the Midianite's dream and the interpretation, than "he wor-

shipped." He acknowledged the hand of God in this providential occurrence. He bowed the knee in adoration to Him who had given him this fresh assurance of victory. Hastening back to the host of Israel, he said, "Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian." And now, what shall Gideon direct his "three hundred" to do before he leads them to the bold assault? Are they commanded to sharpen their swords, and whet their spears, and prove the strength of their armour? No! He divides his "three hundred" into three companies, and puts a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. Having done so, he proclaims, "Look on me, and do likewise; and behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

And now they advance in the silence of the night, and under cover of the darkness, unto the outside of the camp where the Midianites are wrapt in profoundest slumber. The watch, that has been but "newly set," is alone astir, pacing his solitary round. Suddenly the stillness is broken by the shrill blast of a single trumpet. It is the signal-note which Gideon blows, and which is followed

on the instant by the clarion-peal of the "three hundred," as each soldier, with his trumpet at his lips, sends forth an answer to his chieftain's call. The night is filled with the warlike sound, which, inspiring courage in the hearts of the Lord's army, rudely startles the affrighted enemy from their dreams. And now every man breaks the pitcher that is in his hand, and the darkness is lighted up by the blaze of three hundred lamps, while the thrilling battle-cry is heard issuing from three hundred throats, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" So shouting, they march onward, and encircle the camp; and the mighty army to which they are opposed, panic-stricken, answers the ringing watchword with a cry of terror, and flies in confusion and dismay. Nay, so utterly are the Midianites appalled and aghast, that in the wildness of their fears they do not distinguish friend from foe, but "every man's sword is turned against his fellow," and numbers are slain, pierced by the sword held in a friendly hand.

Truly God fought for Israel in that battle. And, as we call to mind this memorable night of Gideon's victory, may we not take up the final words of Deborah's triumphant song over Sisera's defeat, and say, "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might!"

There are, without any straining, some deep spiritual lessons to be derived from this marvellous victory of Gideon over the enemies of God. Observe, first, the weakness of the instrument employed to effect the glorious result. There were but "three hundred men" selected to oppose that mighty host which "lay along in the valley, like grasshoppers for multitude, and whose camels were without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude." These champions of Israel were not armed with strong weapons of war—furbished swords and glittering spears, helmets of brass and coats of mail. In the one hand they held each but an earthen pitcher, with a torch-fire within; in the other but a trumpet, on which a loud blast was to be blown; and these, with the cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" were the seemingly inadequate instruments by which Gideon's victory was achieved over Israel's confederate foes.

What a striking figure we have here of man's redemption from sin, and Satan, and hell! May there not be inscribed on all the means which God has employed to deliver us from our spiritual enemies, countless and mighty as they are, the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"? When man fell, and the world was lost, and Satan triumphed in the ruin that he had wrought, how was it that God

determined to wrench the victory from his hands? He might have sent forth legions of the heavenly angels, who would have overwhelmed him with their shining cohorts, and scattered with their forces all the hosts of hell. But this was not God's method of proceeding. When the fulness of time came, His own Son, "taking upon Him the form of a servant," "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," "a partaker in our flesh and blood," appeared on this earth "a Son of man," to be the Saviour of men, and beneath His heel to crush the serpent's head. "It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto his brethren;" capable of being tempted; of suffering; of entering into the depth of all our sorrows; and of being tried by the experience of all our woe. He was in very deed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." "He was despised and rejected of men; and when they saw Him there was no beauty that they should desire Him." Yet within "the earthen vessel" there was "the lamp of fire." Enshrined within the frail humanity, there was the burning lamp of Deity; and He who was lightly esteemed of men was "the Power of God," and "the Wisdom of God unto salvation." And when "the earthen vessel"—the tabernacle of the Divine nature—was broken on the cross; when "through death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" then did "the fires"

of the Godhead break forth, and in His resurrection "He was declared to be the Son of God with power." In rising for our justification, He proved Himself that Conqueror of whom Isaiah spake when he said, alluding to Gideon's victory, "For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."

And when the Saviour afterwards would advance His kingdom upon earth, how seemingly feeble were the instruments He employed to further this mighty end! Men—some of them fishermen, some of them tax-gatherers—were sent forth into the moral wastes that they might grapple with the world's idolatry, and carry the religion of the Cross to the farthest districts of the earth. That men, like the apostles, with no rank, with no external gifts, with no pomp or circumstance which could challenge the attention of the world, should throw down the gauntlet, and summon the world's philosophy and power to the struggle; surely this appeared an unequal contest, and one which must terminate to the confusion of the preachers of the newly-originated faith. But "God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, did God choose; yea, and things which are not, to bring to

nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." So it was still with the preaching of the Gospel afterwards. "I came not," said St. Paul, "with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." It was ever "through the foolishness of preaching that it pleased God to save them that believe;" while the Apostle declared that he was "with his converts in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." And yet how greatly were his labours owned! He it was who, through his abounding zeal and patient endurance, did more than others to overturn the kingdom of "the prince of this world," and to establish the rule of Christ, because "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." It must be said of the first preachers of the faith, "that the treasure was in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of them;" but in the vessels was "the lamp"—the torch-light kindled from above. The Spirit of the living God came down upon them with the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and sat on the head of each in cloven tongues like as of fire; and their lips were touched with a heavenly flame, and their hearts were filled with a heavenly love. The trumpet-call, which bade them prepare themselves for the strife with the world's superstitions and idolatries, gave "no uncertain sound,"

and because the Pentecostal fire was on their lips, and the Pentecostal flame was in their hearts, their preaching was "with demonstration of the Spirit and with power," and was "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." "The sword" which they wielded was indeed "the sword of the Lord;" with this they fought, and with this they overcame. "Christ crucified," was their watchword; "Christ crucified," their battle-cry. And while with this they marched onward to victory, "the sword of the Spirit" was found to be "sharp in the heart of the king's enemies;" yea, to be "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow," and to be "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

There is another reflection suggested by the war-shout of Israel, when Gideon led on his host to the defeat of their oppressors and their own deliverance. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Had "the sword of Gideon" not been "the sword also of the Lord," it had been more powerless against the hosts of Midian than a broken reed. Had "the sword of the Lord" not been wielded by the hand of Gideon, Israel would not have won the victory over the foe. It is so in the Christian warfare. Here the Christian is a fellow-worker with God. God's grace and man's exertion go

hand in hand. Though we are "justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," yet are we to "fight the good fight of faith," and "war a good warfare." We are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," while "God worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." He that calls us to the battle, gives us the sword which we use, and whereby we overcome. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And this "faith" cometh from above; it is the gift of God's grace. Oh, blessed gift of our Heavenly Father! Oh, gracious boon of the Divine love! Oh, glorious trust for all who cast themselves in their perfect weakness upon Him whose strength is sufficient for the feeblest saint who was ever bidden to "take the whole armour of God, that he might stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand!' This treasure of faith is indeed but in "earthen vessels;" frail in themselves and perishable; let us acknowledge it; the light within is not our own; it is only imparted from above; and to Him who has kindled the flame be all the glory and all the praise. Often is the light hidden and obscured by the dull and dark vessels in which it is contained; but the day is coming in which the sorry pitcher shall be shivered and broken. The earthly house of this tabernacle shall be taken down, and then shall the imprisoned fire leap forth, and,

shooting heavenward, shall seek and find its centre and satisfaction in God. In the mean time, let us draw courage and strength from this "Night of Gideon's Victory," remembering that the same God who assured him of the conquest over his enemies, also has said to each one of us with respect to our spiritual foes, "Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand."

Lastly, that loud blast of Gideon's trumpet which sent terror and dismay through the proud host of Midian, should remind us of that "last trump" which shall shake the heavens and the earth, and proclaim the advent of the Son of man as He comes in avenging power. A greater than Gideon shall come with "the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God," and be "revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amidst darkness and storm, and earthquake and fire, shall He come; and the graves shall open, and the dead shall rise; and the buried shall march onward to the Great White Throne. And how shall we meet Him? As one whom we have long known, long loved, long desired to see, as "Jehovah-shalom," the Lord our peace; as one whose presence fills our hearts with joy even amidst the terrors of a doomed and perishing world? Or shall we be filled with fear, as if certain death were

coming upon us, and everlasting woe? In horror and anguish of heart, and racked by dread of the terrible wretchedness that lies before us, shall we "cry to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us"? Or shall we, in the triumphant blessedness of that hour, lift up our heads with joy and say, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for Him: we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation"? One of these alternatives is before you. Turn not away from these solemn thoughts. The things are true, whether you will receive them or not: your unbelief cannot shake the faithfulness of God. Under God, it lies with yourselves to choose that life immortal, and full of glory, which shall be the portion of all who come to Christ for pardon, holiness, and bliss. And it equally lies with yourselves to choose that undying death, that unending darkness, that agony insufferable, which shall be the doom and destiny of all who, rejecting the offers of mercy, refuse to repent and believe.

CHAPTER XI.

The Night of Samuel's Call.

THEM THAT HONOUR ME I WILL HONOUR, AND THEY THAT DESPISE ME SHALL BE LIGHTLY ESTEEMED."

"And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child."—
1 Samuel iii. 8.

The Night of Samuel's Call.

The shadows of night had fallen on Shiloh. The time of evening sacrifice was over; the worshippers had withdrawn from the courts of the Lord's house, and silence reigned within the sanctuary. In the temple, the lamp of God was still burning, and the ark of God was there, hallowing the place by its presence. The venerable Eli, priest of the Most High, now old and wellnigh blind, was "laid down in his place," and the child Samuel, not far off, had also lain down to sleep. Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken by a Voice calling the boy. The lad, supposing it was Eli whom he heard, hastens to his helpless friend to offer him the service he may require. "Here am I; for thou calledst me." "I called not; lie down again," is the old man's reply. Twice did Samuel, when addressed by God, run to Eli to proffer his aid, and on each occasion the aged priest made answer that his was not the voice which called. But when God

spake the third time in Samuel's ears, Eli awoke to the real meaning of the incident: "he perceived that the Lord had called the child." He understood that the favoured boy had been selected to receive one of those Divine communications which in that degenerate age had become so rare: "for the Word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." He therefore gave Samuel directions how to conduct himself under so high an honour. "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." So Samuel went and lay down in his place, and quietly waited until the Voice was heard again. "Then came the Lord, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak: for thy servant heareth." In language of stern and terrible denunciations, God revealed to the child the judgments which should overtake Eli and his whole house. "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor

offering for ever." No wonder that Samuel "feared to show Eli the vision." No wonder that the boy shrank from the painful duty of disclosing to his kind and affectionate protector this fearful proclamation of wrath and judgment. It was only after the most solemn and urgent importunity on the part of Eli that the child was induced to deliver this burden of woe. "God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto thee." "And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him." And the good old man received the rebuke with submission. Not a word of impatience or repining escaped his mouth. He was content that the little child whom he had himself nursed and nurtured should be the channel of a message so fraught with vengeance and with woe. He neither broke out into resentment against the reluctant bearer of the evil tidings, nor did he charge God foolishly, nor did he attempt to offer any plea in justification of himself. He acknowledged the entire righteousness of the sentence,—and the perfect acquiescence of a broken and contrite heart found vent in the simple utterance, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Such are the incidents of "The Night of Samuel's Call," so far as they had reference to the youthful boy and the grey-haired saint. We will examine the subject under this double aspect, considering

first how it bore upon Samuel; and secondly, how it bore upon Eli. Let us turn our thoughts at once to the truths which may be gathered "for our instruction in righteousness" from the early history of Samuel — the child whose very name was a memorial of the Lord's goodness: "Asked of God." Surely the Christian mother may learn an important lesson from the example of her who took the child in his earliest youth, and dedicated him solemnly to the Lord. When Hannah, in bitterness of soul, had "prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore," because the Lord had shut up her womb, she vowed that if He would look upon her affliction, and give unto her a man child, then she would "give him unto God, and there should no razor come upon his head." She therefore regarded the child as a sacred gift, and rejoiced when the time came to take him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and to consecrate him there to the service of the Lord. Need the Christian parent be reminded that "children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift, that cometh of the Lord," and that the gift should be dedicated to the Giver? Our blessed Lord has encouraged an early consecration of the young to Himself. In what beautiful words has He taught us that the little ones are welcome to His arms! "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And how

high, how holy, is the privilege of bringing them to the baptismal font, and, so far as in us lies, of following Hannah's example, when, with a heart filled with grateful love to God, she stood before the venerable priest and said, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord!" That infancy is no disqualification for a religious privilege was shown by God's express command that the rite of circumcision should be adminstered to infants; and can we think that a Jew stood here on a higher vantage-ground than a Christian—that the Jew from his earliest days might dedicate his child by a solemn ceremony to God, and that the Christian is forbidden this lofty and priceless privilege? Who can help believing that the fitness, at least, of infant baptism may be inferred from our Lord's direction that the little ones should be "suffered" to approach Him? And surely they who bring an infant to be baptized, may draw high and holy encouragement in this their "charitable work" from the endearing and interesting attitude in which our blessed Redeemer is presented to us in the tenth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, where, as the Good Shepherd, He fulfilled the prophetic announcement, "He shall gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom." This is the

passage of Scripture which the Church of England has chosen for the Gospel on the occasion when an infant is to be baptized, and her comment on this beautiful and touching record of the Saviour's willingness to receive the young is the following:—"Ye perceive how by His outward gesture and deed He declared His good will toward them; for He embraced them in His arms, He laid His hands on them, and blessed them. Doubt ye not, therefore, but earnestly believe, that He will likewise favourably receive this present infant, that He will embrace him with the arms of His mercy, that He will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of His everlasting kingdom." The parent who in faith and prayer brings his child to the baptismal font, can scarcely fail of being comforted and animated as he is reminded of the gracious condescension of the Redeemer towards children, or fail of being persuaded that his infant shall also be received, and "be born again, and be made an heir of everlasting salvation." Baptism is no empty ceremony. While there is the one error to be guarded against—that of those who maintain that there is a necessary and inseparable connection between the being baptized with water and the being baptized with the Holy Ghost—there is also the other error to be avoided, that of those who turn it into a mere form, and forget how very solemn is that sacrament

wherein, at the Saviour's command, we dedicate our children to God, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." For this very rite of baptism—this very privilege of early dedicating our little ones to God, brings with it great responsibilities, both for children and parents. For does not "Baptism represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him, that as He died, and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living"? And is it not the parent's bounden duty to take all possible pains to train his children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" to teach them by "line upon line, and precept upon precept;" and to instruct them in those "holy Scriptures which are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus"? Nor must there be only godly instruction, but prayer, vigilance, wise counsel, and patient stedfastness of example. We cannot begin too early to develop and strengthen what is good in the child's temper and disposition, and to keep in check and subdue what we see to be evil. Solemn and sacred are the obligations which rest upon every Christian father and mother. Great and vast are the interests

involved in the bringing up of our children for God. Parents, how are you discharging your duties? how meeting your responsibilities? Are you making religion the *first thing* in the education of your children? Are you plainly showing them that you consider everything secondary to their "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"? About what do you evince the greatest anxiety—their progress in learning or their progress in piety? their education for time or their education for eternity? Oh, how sad is that system of education pursued by many parents who "profess and call themselves Christians"! They manifest greater care that their children should acquire the accomplishments of earth, than that they should be adorned with the graces of heaven. They seem incomparably more anxious that they should possess the ability of making their way in the world, than the ability of "laying hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel." Far be it from any Christian man to utter a word against the cultivation of the mind; far be it from any Christian man to decry the elegancies of life, or to condemn the accomplishments which may go hand in hand with the solid acquirements of a liberal education. But withal, our great anxiety should be to make our children feel that we consider everything to be secondary to their "seeking first the kingdom of

God and His righteousness." We may *tell* them this, but do we show by our example that we *mean* it? Example! example! No teacher so eloquent as example! And remember that children are sharp-sighted in their discernment; are quick at detecting inconsistencies between the precepts and the practice. Do you let them see by your actions, as well as instruct them by your words, that you are, before all things, desirous that they should be followers of Christ, and obtain that "blessing of the Lord which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow therewith"? Oh, let us propose to ourselves these and the like searching questions; for we have immortal souls in our keeping, and they need all our watchfulness, and carefulness, and prayer. Oh, let us see whether, with all our love for our children, and with all our professed earnestness for their welfare, we are carrying out those solemn responsibilities to which we pledged ourselves, when, having brought them to the baptismal font, we did what Hannah did for Samuel, and "lent them unto the Lord."

With regard to Samuel himself, we read that this child of prayer and faith grew up "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." The language in which his youthful piety is recorded is most remarkable, reminding us of what is stated of the childhood of Him, "who although He was in the form of God,

and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Of the holy child Jesus it is written, "He grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Again it is said, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." Of the child Samuel it is written, "He grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men." Happy child, on whose head rested the dew of the Divine grace! Favoured boy, to whom was revealed that "secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him!" Like Enoch, he walked the world with God. Like the just man, his path resembled "the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." A bright example he was of faith and holiness unto his brethren in Israel; a "burning and a shining light" he was, which made manifest and put to shame the wickedness of the ungodly. "The Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground." "All Israel, from Dan even unto Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." The whole life of Samuel is but a striking commentary on the saying of God Himself, "Them that honour me, I will honour." In him we see the blessedness of one who, early dedicated to God, presented

from childhood to age a most bright and blessed example of consistent holiness, childlike simplicity, unflinching boldness, and unblemished integrity. Read his history, and mark his earnestness and love in leading Israel to repentance; his boldness in rebuking idolatry; his zeal in vindicating the glory of God; his impartial and constant administration of justice; his rebuke of Saul's disobedience; — observe the manner in which he fulfilled the three offices of prophet, priest, and king, which were combined in his own person: and see how through his whole life "the beauties of holiness" shone brightly forth both in his character and conversation. No wonder that when he died, all the "Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah." Embalmed in a grateful nation's heart, he was carried to the tomb with a nation's tears. All the people lifted up their voices and wept, as they felt that a great man and a prince had fallen in Israel, and that the blank which he left in the councils of wisdom and war it would be difficult to supply.

Oh, that the young might learn from the story of Samuel the glory of a life spent in the service of God! The man who makes it his "chief end to know, to serve, to glorify, and to enjoy God for ever," gathers round him a grandeur and nobility of character, and an earnestness of purpose, which

is unknown to the man who lives only for self or for the world. It has been well and beautifully said, "God hath so ordered it, that honour is naturally consequent upon the honouring Him. God hath made goodness a noble and a stately thing, hath impressed upon it that beauty and majesty which commands an universal love and veneration, which strikes presently both a kindly and an awful respect into the mind of all men. Power may be dreaded; riches may be coveted; wit and knowledge may be admired; but only goodness is truly esteemed and honoured; and, even were there nothing of this present recompense, an exceeding and eternal weight of glory is in store for those who consecrated all their endeavours, and sacrificed their lives, to the promoting of God's honour." "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is," as well as "of that which is to come." Yes, we may be fully persuaded that the true servant of God is far happier, is more honoured in his day and generation, more highly esteemed even by those who differ from him, than the man who exists only for the pleasures and pursuits of earth, and has no higher objects than those of the present world. "The righteous," not only in himself, but also in the esteem of others, "is more excellent than his neighbour." Let those who have life still before them, and who have not yet awakened to the true glory of existence; who are labouring in

vain, and spending their strength for nought, come and try a more excellent way. While the dew of your youth is resting freshly upon you; while the affections are tender, and the conscience unseared, "yield yourselves to God." Take upon you the easy yoke and light burden of Christ; enter into that service which is "the most perfect freedom;" and so realise in your own blessed experience, that "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

But we have still to consider the reference which "the Night of Samuel's Call" had to Eli, the venerable priest of God. This is the dark side of the picture. Samuel was the channel through whom the dreadful message against Eli's sons was delivered to their aged father. Hophni and Phinehas had been guilty of the most scandalous outrages and excesses, and had prostituted to the vilest purposes their priestly character and office. In ministering about holy things, they were the first to pollute them, and to trample under foot the sanctity of the law of the Lord. So great was their rapacity and violence at the time of sacrifice, that they seized on more than the priests' appointed share of the flesh that was thrown into the caldron, and by their lawless and profane behaviour caused men to "abhor the offering of the Lord." To this sin they added still a darker crime. They turned the holy temple of God into a den of pollution,

and defiled the tabernacle by indulging at its very doors in a licentiousness as gross as it was daring. They are well described as "sons of Belial," who "knew not the Lord." Sad and humbling is the history! Sad and humbling the record of Eli's conduct towards his sons! For though they were guilty of wickedness the most abandoned and unblushing, though they disgraced their holy office by rapacity and sensuality, making themselves vile, *yet "Eli restrained them not."* As a parent, he failed in his duty. He was weak when he ought to have been firm; indulgent when he ought to have been decided. Though he was a holy man, and hated sin, yet as a mistaken, and over-fond father, he spared reproof and correction, and out of false tenderness to his sons, neglected to enforce his rightful authority. "He restrained them not." He failed, in their early years, to form in them the habit of obedience, and as they grew in strength and stature, and force of will, the task of controlling what was wrong in their characters and dispositions became more and more difficult. There can be little doubt that he gave them all proper instruction; that he prayed for them; that he set before them the example of a holy and a blameless life. "But he restrained them not!" Ah, *here* was his sin. He acted with unbecoming lenity. It is true, when he heard of their crimes in the season of their manhood, he remonstrated

with them faithfully. "Why do you such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" But gentle expostulation was not enough. He should have used the authority of a parent, and taken more decided measures to "restrain" their unruly passions, and to keep them in check. Nay, as a ruler and judge, he ought solemnly to have cast them out of the office which they profaned, and cleansing the sanctuary of the foul scandal which they brought upon it, should have executed that full measure of severity which their offences deserved. From first to last he failed in a father's duty, and the selfish love which spoiled, instead of restraining his sons, brought its own natural retribution; and the issue was, that "the iniquity of Eli's house was not purged for ever."

There is the most emphatic warning for parents in this woeful history. Eli, it is said, "honoured his sons above God." He preferred to treat them with a false indulgence rather than to exercise that authority which, as a father, he derived from God Himself, and which was entrusted to him by God for his children's good. And so, as with many a parent, the children who should have been his

honour, became his reproach and shame. In his case, as in too many others, were those most awful words fulfilled, "I will curse thy blessings." And must it not be ever so where the reins of parental discipline are relaxed; and when the parent, from a fondness which is after all selfish, and a tenderness which is nothing better than a shrinking from personal pain, neglects to exercise faithfully and fully his influence and authority in "restraining" his children from evil? How mournful the record, Eli "honoured his sons above God!" He preferred their indulgence and gratification to God's glory,—and terribly did he suffer for his sin.

The Israelites engage in war with the Philistines, and are smitten before them, with a loss of four thousand men. On their defeat, the elders of the people propose to bring down to the camp the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, superstitiously believing that its presence will save them out of the hands of their enemies. Hophni and Phinehas accompany the ark to the battle-field; and "when it comes into the camp, all Israel,"—thinking that here is a pledge of victory,—"shout with a great shout, so that the earth rings again." Mean time, Eli is left at Shiloh, full of fear and anxiety, for Samuel's prophecy still echoes in his ears, and his heart dreads the issue of the fight. He cannot tarry in his house; he is too restless, too weighed down by heavy forebodings for that.

The freedom or bondage of his country will be decided by the battle. The ark of God may fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. His two sons are there; ungrateful, unnatural; but he loves them still. And should they be slain in the bloody contest, how unfit to die! With guilt such as theirs, what prospect before them, if slain, but anguish and never-ending woe? Truly, "his sin is finding him out." And so, disquieted by fear, the unhappy father hastens forth to the road along which the messenger must pass who will bear tidings from the field of battle. How affecting is the picture—is there another more so?—that the sacred historian draws of the old man as he waits for tidings from the war! "Lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God." And he sits not there in vain. For now a man of Benjamin comes running from the army, and it is too evident that a bloody battle has been fought, and that Israel is defeated. His clothes are rent, and earth is upon his head. But Eli's eyes are so dimmed with age, that he cannot see these tokens of disaster; and it is no until the noise of wailing in the city tells him there must be tidings of woe, that he becomes aware of the arrival of the messenger from the camp. Then the hurried cry breaks from his lips, as he strains his sightless eyes, and stretches out his trembling arms, "What meaneth the noise of this tumult?"

And the man of Benjamin replies, "I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?" And the messenger delivers his evil tidings. There is horror upon horror. "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God is taken!" "The ark of God is taken!" this,—though the battle makes the old man childless, and his two sinning sons are amongst the slain,—*this* is the crowning calamity. Eli can bear up no longer. The patriot could endure the tidings of his country's defeat; the parent could survive the loss of his two sons; but the priest of the Most High God cannot outlive the terrible tidings that the ark has fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised. Crushed by this disastrous intelligence, "he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy."

Nor did the work of desolation in Eli's household stop here. The priesthood passes, after some years, into another line; and not a man of his race ministers thenceforwards before the altar of the Lord. His whole house labours under a curse. Most pathetic, most deeply touching is the last incident recorded of the immediate family of Eli.

The wife of Phinehas, near the hour of her travail, hears that her husband is slain in the bloody battle-field, and that her father-in-law is suddenly dead. The double blow is too much for her. Her delicate frame cannot support the shock. She bows her head, and travails. The cry of her anguish is heard. And though the women about her try to sustain her dying spirit by saying, "Fear not; for thou hast borne a son," she feels no "joy that a man is born into the world." "She answers not, neither regards it." She is broken-hearted. She refuses to be comforted. Not alone is her nation defeated, her father-in-law dead, and the ark taken, but her godless husband has died in his sins, miserably, and without hope. Paying no heed in her agony to the kindly words of the women, she only exerts her fast failing strength to name her orphaned child; and with her dying breath she calls it "I-chabod"; for she says, "The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."

Finally, let us be warned and solemnized by this terrible history. Let the godly tremble. Let them "stand in awe, and sin not." See how sharply God deals with sin in His own people. He never looks upon it with lenient eye. He never connives at it. If Eli, the priest, who ministered for a lifetime at the altar of God; Eli, who for many years administered righteous

judgment in Israel; if Eli, the holy and the patient, was treated with unrelenting severity,—what may we expect if we offend? Ponder upon these words, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Be assured that God hates sin with a perfect hatred; that "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity." Oh, let the sinner beware of trying God too far. Let him be fully persuaded that "God will render to every man according to his deeds; unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile."

CHAPTER XII.

The Night of Despair.

"TERRORS SHALL MAKE HIM AFRAID ON EVERY SIDE, AND SHALL DRIVE HIM TO HIS FEET."

"And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee."—1 SAMUEL XXVIII. 8.

The Night of Despair.

It is the thought of its former glory which fills the heart with a solemn sadness as we gaze on the ruins of some noble castle, the work of a master hand. We contrast its present with the past. In these roofless walls once rank and grandeur dwelt; through these dismantled chambers once youth and beauty moved; and these stately halls, where now only is heard the sighing of the wind, once echoed to the voice of melody and mirth. Alas, what a change! We mourn that a palace so noble should crumble to decay. So the contrast between former greatness and present misery is always sad and mournful. How touching to see royalty discrowned and unthroned; the sceptre lost; the power vanished; the pomp, the purple, the pageantry, all, all gone for ever! But a spectacle more melancholy than either of these is presented to us in that night scene where Saul seeks the weird woman of Endor in her cave. Looking at the king of Israel,

we see the wreck of bright hopes and fair promises; we behold a man fallen from his high estate; and, as we look, may we not write, "Ichabod, the glory is departed"? Oh, "how has the gold become dim, the much fine gold perished!" When Saul is first introduced to our notice there is everything to prepossess us in his favour. His commanding height, his personal beauty, his heroic bearing, seem to mark him out as one who is "every inch a king,"—as a man who will grace the office he is destined to bear. The voice of the people coincides with the Divine purpose of placing Saul upon the throne. Samuel brings Saul before all the tribes of Israel, and, directing their regards to the son of Kish, exclaims, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" And "all the people shout," and exclaim, "God save the king!" Favoured man, we say, who is appointed by God Himself to sit on the throne of Israel, and who is received with acclaim by the subjects over whom he is to rule! How will he fulfil his high destiny? Shall "his path be like that of the just man, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day?" Or shall he be but as "a wandering star, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever?" We shall see.

In order to gather up the lessons which Saul's history teaches us, it will be necessary to trace the

story of his life a little in detail. And, first, let us recall some of those providential circumstances which preceded Saul's elevation to the throne. Saul had left home on a fruitless search for the asses of his father, which had been lost. Wearied in vain attempts to find them, he was about to return home, when the servant who accompanied him advised his master to consult Samuel, "a man of God," and "an honourable man," who would direct them which way to go, and whose words would surely "come to pass." Saul listened to the suggestion, and, having come to the city where the prophet was, he met a troop of young maidens going out to draw water, who told him that Samuel was expected in the high place of sacrifice, where the people were waiting to receive his blessing. God had already prepared Samuel for Saul's visit; so that when Saul approached the place where the prophet stood, Samuel, having first reassured his mind respecting the object of his search, accosted him in the words, "On whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on thy father's house?" And Saul answered and said, "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" There was in this reply a modesty and humility which augured well for the character of the man who was chosen

to govern Israel. Samuel now took Saul, and brought him to his house, where thirty guests were assembled, and set him in the chiefest place, and ordered the portion of the sacrifice, which had been especially reserved in expectation of his visit, to be given him, and they ate together that day. On the morning which followed this festival, "Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon Saul's head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?" He also gave Saul further instructions; foretold him that he should meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, singing the praises of God, and prophesying in His name; and that he should be endowed with the same Divine power, and should be "turned into another man." And so it was. "When he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart, and all those signs came to pass that day." As he met the company marching to the sound of psaltery, and tabret, and pipe, and harp, "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them." So strange a thing did this Divine gift to Saul appear to those who had known Saul before, that they asked in surprise, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

And here let us pause in the history. So far all is well. Here is a commencement so auspicious

and bright, that it promises a happy and prosperous reign. Has, then, Saul received that "new heart" which accompanies the spiritual renewal of the nature? Has that mighty change passed over him which brings with it the earnest of all other blessings, and which is the evidence of adoption into the family of God? Is the "other heart," which is in the king, a heart in which the kingdom of God is established,—the kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?" These questions can only be answered by another,—Shall we, as we trace his onward history, find that he ordereth his conversation aright, and walks in God's judgments and statutes to do them? And you are already aware that this was far from being the case; his course, instead of being an upward one, was a downward,—darkening ever more and more to the night of a hopeless death. So that when it is said that "God gave him another heart," we are to understand that God endowed him with gifts and capacities which fitted him for the high station to which he was divinely called. He was given nobility of mind and greatness of spirit, and was in views, abilities, and inclinations qualified for the royal office which he was to exercise for the prosperity of his country and the good of his subjects. In this sense, "old things had passed away; behold, all things had

become new." His mind was intent on his new duties; he felt that he had been chosen by God to fill the throne; and that he could depend on Divine grace, both as a guide and a defence. But this is all that can be said. In no stage of his history does he give any indication of having become "a new creature,"—of having been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into spiritual light.

Let us now resume the history. It was not long before his principles were tried, and the true character of the man brought out. After he had reigned two years over Israel, a war broke out against the Philistines. It was the eve of conflict. Saul, with his army, was waiting to attack the enemy in the passage of Michmash. The Israelites were in sore distress, for the Philistines were in number as the sand which is on the sea-shore. They could not, however, take the field against the foe, until a sacrifice was offered to the Lord. Saul had been directed to wait seven days, till Samuel should arrive, and offer burnt offerings and peace offerings on God's altar. The time appointed by Samuel for his arrival passed by, and the prophet had not come. Saul, impatient of the delay, followed the natural impulse of his own mind, set aside the positive command of God, and, assuming to himself the functions of the priesthood, performed the sacrifice himself. For this he was

rebuked by Samuel; but the rebuke only produced an excuse which showed that he had done violence to his conscience in not tarrying for the prophet's approach. "I said, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering." "I forced myself." There was a confessed struggle in his breast between the felt conviction of what was right, and the apparent expediency of doing wrong. He had his scruples, but he steadily set himself to overcome them. Conscience was resisted. He hesitated; but he persuaded himself that there was a necessity for sinning. And so he sought to shelter his disobedience under the hollow plea of constraint. Oh! mark, how beneath this apology for wilfulness, lies concealed the germ of Saul's future dark and downward career! There is a world of meaning wrapped up in this worthless excuse, "*I forced myself* therefore, and offered a burnt offering." We are prepared for anything after this sin against a struggling conscience. We are not surprised to see how Saul's wilful character comes out into bolder and more marked prominence. Oh, beware how you ever "force" your conscience to sanction a sin. Take heed how you resist a striving Spirit, or do violence to your convictions of what is right. If ever you so far sacrifice your better principles and feelings, it

will be proved in your case, as it was proved in Saul's, that so grievous a folly is "as the letting out of water."

We come now to a crisis in the history of the man. He is commissioned to destroy Amalek—to "slay both men and women, infant and suckling, oxen and sheep, and camel and ass." But though he undertook the expedition with alacrity, and God gave him the victory, yet he did the work of the Lord deceitfully. For his own ends he listened to the voice of the people, and spared Agag, the king of Amalek, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and of the lambs, and "utterly destroyed" only that which was "refuse and vile." The falseness of his heart was shown in the salutation with which he met Samuel after the battle: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord." "What meaneth, then," says the prophet, "this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Then mark how all that was brave, and generous, and noble, had entirely disappeared from his character. How full of meanness is his reply! "*The people* spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen." Miserable subterfuge! "How are the mighty fallen!" No wonder that when he further pleaded that his reason for sparing the best of the sheep and of the oxen was that he might offer them as a sacrifice unto God, Samuel

returned the stern reply: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." And now God announces, through the mouth of His prophet, that the kingdom shall be rent from Saul, and be given to another better than he, even to "a man after God's own heart." To assure Saul that this judgment will be executed, Samuel adds, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent." The stern words wring a cry of anguish from the heart of the guilty king — "I have sinned!" "I have sinned!" Oh, that the cry might be a sign of that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of!" Oh, that the hard rock might at length be smitten, and the healing tears gush forth! But no. The man's hollowness is shown in the very next words that he utters. "I have sinned," he cries, "*yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel,* and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." Not from his sin he prays to be delivered, but from its earthly consequences. His chiefest grief was not that he had sinned against God, but for the punishment which should follow.

Samuel, pitying the fallen king, listens to his

request, and turns with him to worship the Lord. The judgment is executed upon Agag; "Samuel hews him in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." And now Samuel and Saul part; their ways lie in different directions; the king loses from this time his wise adviser, his faithful counsellor; for Samuel "comes no more to see Saul until the day of his death." But though they meet no more while the prophet lives, Samuel mourns for Saul — grieves over his hardened course—sorrows for his impenitence and sin; and down the old man's cheek may have coursed the bitter and burning tear, because the king of Israel kept not God's law. Unhappy Saul! So far has he wandered in the ways of sin, that "the Lord repents that he has made him king over Israel."

And now darker and deeper shadows gather round the fallen king. His history henceforth is but one sad record of grievous wickedness and suffering. He has resisted conscience, "quenched the Spirit," disobeyed God, and in consequence is left to his own devices—forsaken and abandoned by the Lord. "An evil spirit from the Lord troubles him." Dark and fierce passions take possession of his soul. Haunted by remorse, goaded by an avenging conscience, depressed, sullen, moody, he is ever more and more absorbed into the gathering gloom of a terrible despair. To soothe his morbid and passionate

madness, the harp of David is called in; and it comes to pass that as the son of Jesse sweeps the tuneful chords, "the evil spirit" leaves the fitful king. His burdened and guilty mind is charmed for awhile to peace. But David's music cannot banish entirely "the evil spirit;" it can only chase it away for a time. Very soon the unhappy king grows jealous of the minstrel by whose melody his agitated mind has been soothed. Once and again, with his own hand, he attempts the life of David,—with a wild and ungovernable rage pursuing him from place to place, until he drives him into exile for self-preservation. He even slays the priest of the Lord who supplied David with food when he was an hungered, and gave him of the hallowed bread from the table of the Lord. At times indeed, when David shows a gracious forbearance, and spares his life when he has it in his power, holier and gentler emotions are aroused in the king's bosom. Hot and passionate tears gush from his eyes, and feelings of tenderness sweep across his heart, making us almost hope that he has returned to his former better self. But such emotions are but transient, "like the morning cloud or the early dew," and soon the evil spirit returns and reassumes his old ascendency, and takes possession of the heart which he had left for a season. So fierce and cruel grows the king, that it is with difficulty

he is restrained from putting his own son, Jonathan, to death, in accordance with a rash and hasty vow which he had made.

Darker becomes the tragedy of Saul's life. The gloom which enshrouds the king deepens. The Philistines are gathered together against Israel; Samuel is dead, and Saul, forsaken of God,—helpless and hopeless,—is about to engage in battle with his enemies. His mind is filled with the gloomiest forebodings; his heart trembles for the issue of the fight; he knows not where to turn for aid. In his fear and extremity he betakes himself to the Lord, but the Lord answers him not, "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." He offers a terrible example of the fulfilment of the solemn threatening of God in the Book of Proverbs: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh upon you; when your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. There-

fore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices."

Receiving no answer from God, Saul in despair has recourse to witchcraft and sorcery. In his better days he had, in accordance with the expressed command of God, that "a witch should not be suffered to live," "put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards out of the land." But now, fallen from the bright promise of his early years, forsaken of God, sore perplexed and disturbed, he goes down to the cave of the enchantress, and applies for help to her subtle and necromantic arts. He directs his servants to find him a woman that has a familiar spirit, and they inform him of one who has her residence at Endor. And Saul disguises himself in strange raiment, and when the night has come, he goes, sheltered by the darkness, to the woman, and bids her call up, by her supernatural arts, the dead person whose name he will give her. The woman, knowing that Saul had cut off wizards from the land, and dreading lest she may become the victim of treachery, shrinks from acceding to his request. But Saul removes her alarm by the solemn assurance: "As the Lord liveth, there shall no harm happen to thee for this thing." On this, the woman demands the name of the person that she is to bring up from the dead. "And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice;

and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me; for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid; what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself." It is not clear from the narrative by what means the sorceress recognised Saul; nor does it concern us much to know. The point of deepest interest is the apparition of the old man cloaked in his mantle. Was this the shade of the venerable Samuel himself? Was it, as some suppose, Satan assuming the form of the buried prophet? Or was the whole scene, as others imagine, a cunning trick and imposture,—the witch by her subtle arts of incantation cheating the senses of Saul, and giving to falsehood the colour of reality? Without pretending to decide whether the familiar spirit with whom the woman was in alliance might not at her wish clothe himself in the form of the dead Samuel, or how far the arts of witchcraft might be carried, we may still put aside all doubt on the point that it was Samuel himself that stood on this night before Saul. Not that it is needful to suppose that the woman herself expected to evoke from the grave the shade of the venerable prophet. She

may have hoped by her incantations to have fooled the senses of Saul, and with the help of the Evil One to make him believe that Samuel was indeed summoned back to earth. She must have known that she could have no control over "the spirits of just men made perfect;" she must have been aware that no necromancy of hers could disturb the repose of those faithful servants of God who had entered that world "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." The truth appears to be that while the woman was making use of enchantments, which might deceive the eyes and satisfy the mind of Saul, God Himself interposed, and for Saul's punishment sent back the dead prophet with a message of woe. The sorceress was evidently bewildered and affrighted when Samuel arose. "She cried," in her terror and amazement, "with a loud voice;" and from her surprise on seeing the apparition, it would seem that the vision was contrary to her own expectation. It is safest to look upon this passage as a plain, historical record of facts. It is best to believe that God, "in order to make Saul's crime the instrument of his punishment in the dreadful denunciation of his approaching doom," did "raise Samuel on the incantations of her who had the familiar spirit, and that a real converse was held between him and the guilty king of Israel." Such appears to be the most consistent explanation of this scene.

There is something most touching—most thrilling—in the conversation which takes place between Samuel and Saul. And Samuel said to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" And Saul answered, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." And Samuel, in reply, rebukes the folly of Saul, in hoping to gain, by unhallowed means, from God's prophet, intelligence which God Himself had already refused to give him. "Wherefore, then, dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" Samuel proceeds to remind Saul how God had rent the kingdom out of his hand, and given it to David, because he had not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor executed his fierce wrath upon Amalek. And as Saul will at all hazards look into the secrets of the future, he shall be told the woe with which the future is charged, and hear his own doom proclaimed. "Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines; and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." No wonder that when Samuel had spoken these words, Saul, as though smitten with

a mailed hand, "fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid." Samuel then returned to the rest from which he had been disturbed, and Saul went on the morrow to do battle with the Philistines. As the prophet said, even so it was. "The men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers." In this last and fearful extremity he implores his armour-bearer to draw his sword and thrust him through; but the armour-bearer shrinks from the deed; and Saul, forlorn, desolate, despairing, falls on his own sword, and enters God's presence with a suicide's guilt upon his soul. Such was the end of Saul, of Saul who was once "amongst the prophets." How sad! how awful the history! How full of the most solemn warning!

Let us endeavour to draw from the character and story of this sinful and unhappy man, one or two lessons which may tend to our profit. And first, the history of Saul teaches us the necessity of a thorough change of heart. Saul had in the beginning of his career given fair promise of high, and noble, and generous qualities: he was ardent, brave, and possessed of virtues which did honour

to that distinguished office to which he was chosen by the will of God and by the voice of the people. But "the root of the matter was not in him." He had not been "renewed in the spirit of his mind." And so he disappointed the bright hopes awakened by the commencement of his reign. Having no fixed religious principle, he soon makes his own will the standard of right, and, disregarding the law of the Lord, "walks after the sight of his eyes and the desire of his heart." He so rejects the suggestions of God's Spirit; so resists "the still small voice;" so wounds his conscience, that at length he is left to himself, and becomes a morbid and gloomy man; jealous and cruel; swayed by ungovernable passions; "led captive by the devil at his will." Alas, how many who appear to promise fair, follow the same downward path as Saul! At first they do not seem "far from the kingdom of God." "They begin to run well." How it gladdens the hearts of parents, and friends, and ministers, to see them apparently receiving the Word with joy,—regular in their attendance in the Lord's house; coming eagerly forward to holy ordinances; and kneeling reverently at the Lord's table. The Spirit of the Most High seems to have touched them. Those who knew them before exclaim in surprise, "What a change! Are they become Christians? 'Is Saul also amongst the prophets?'" And so all goes on well for a time.

But, alas! it soon appears that their "goodness was as a morning cloud, or as the early dew that passes away." It is proved that religious feeling is not conversion. It is shown that pious emotion is not regeneration. The world again gets its old hold upon the heart; and self and Satan gradually become stronger; and God is forgotten; and, like poor Saul, they go deeper and deeper in the miry ways of sin. There are, indeed, compunctions of conscience; keen visitings of remorse; disquieting, uneasy thoughts. There are gleams of brighter and better things, and fitful and desperate struggles to burst the fetters which are around them, and to become free as they were in the happy days that are past. But sad to say, in these wild seasons of remorse, these times of deep dejection, instead of having recourse to God, they have recourse to "David's harp." They endeavour to chase away their melancholy gloom by resorting to the society or amusements of the world: to change of place or occupation, hoping thus to charm away the anguish of "a wounded spirit." And this may answer for a time; but, alas, the evil spirit returns, and there is no turning to Him who alone can "heal the broken heart and change the garment of heaviness into the spirit of praise." And so years pass on: and life grows darker: conscience is seared: the heart is hardened: and when the shadows of the night,—the night of death,—gather

and thicken round the path; there is nothing behind but remorse, and nothing before but despair.

Again, what a picture we have in the latter days of Saul of the close of a sinner's career! Be warned by it; be impressed by it; and be not satisfied with anything short of a thorough conversion of the heart to God. Have you ever thought how touching is the fact that it was Samuel whom Saul desired the weird woman to call up? *Samuel!* And yet it was Samuel who had reproved his disobedience; who had spoken faithfully; who had warned him back from sin. For years before Samuel's death, there had been no intercourse between the king and the Lord's prophet. Saul, probably offended at Samuel's stern rebuke in the matter of Agag, came no more to consult his former adviser and friend. But now, in his sore perplexity, he longs for this faithful counsellor: he turns away from flatterers and courtiers: he begins to know the value of a true friend, and he cannot be satisfied unless Samuel be "called up." How often this conduct of Saul is repeated in the case of too many a man! See there, on yonder death-bed, is one who has "done despite to the Spirit of grace," and made shipwreck of the faith. He is full of distress and anguish: he has no peace: no composure; nothing but fear, and alarm, and dread. For whom shall he send to minister to him comfort and consolation? For

the companion of his hours of mirth and gaiety, of folly and of sin? No, no. But for the faithful friend whose worth is acknowledged too late, and whose counsels, once despised, are now longed for again. Or for the parent,—the father, the mother,—whose loving counsels, once carelessly treated, now acquire a new and true value in his eyes. Ay, or for the faithful minister, one whose affectionate advice was so long and so often regarded with indifference or dislike; but who is now sought for in the eager hope that he may "speak a word in season to the weary." Ah, how often is the minister sent for thus in the last hour of extremity! And how helpless he feels beside that dying bed! For what can he say in answer to the sinner, as he uses words similar to those of Saul, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines (my sins) make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams"? What can he say but what he has said a hundred times before, and what failed to make any impression? And how can he hope to be listened to now, if he presses the duty of faith and repentance, and urges the privilege of looking to Christ, and of seeking pardon through His blood? Every minister will tell you that he has been called to such death-beds. He will tell you how often, after many attempts to administer the consolations of the Gospel, he has gone away in hopelessness,

because he felt the words of Samuel to Saul to be applicable to the poor, restless, unhappy man, who has sent for him in his hour of woe: "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? Wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" Oh, may you never call your minister in to witness such a death-bed as *that*. May you not put off repentance till repentance is "hidden from your eyes." "Now, *now* is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation." May you, in this your day, "know the things which belong to your peace!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The Night of Weeping.

"THOU WAST A GOD THAT FORGAVEST THEM, THOUGH THOU TOOKEST VENGEANCE OF THEIR INVENTIONS."

"David therefore besought God for the child: and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth."—2 SAMUEL XII. 16.

The Night of Weeping.

THERE is something very worthy of remark about the manner in which the lives of holy men are written for our instruction in the Bible. The scriptural biographies of the saints differ greatly from all other religious biographies. The former are distinguished by a simplicity, a dramatic force, a propriety, and, above all, by a truthfulness and impartiality, which we in vain look for elsewhere. They state the evil as fully as the good. They record faults as faithfully as virtues. There is no attempt to palliate error, or to throw a gloss over sin. The events that are mentioned are related in a calm, even, unimpassioned manner, and the historian seldom adds any comment of his own on the incidents which are mentioned. Now, this striking contrast between the biographies of the Bible and all lives written by uninspired men, can be regarded as nothing less than a proof that "the lively oracles" stand apart from all human com-

positions. The marked difference which exists between "the Book" and all other volumes, can only be satisfactorily accounted for by the fact that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," —that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Is there not, for example, an impartiality in the narrative of David's history, which proves that he who held the pen which traced it was but the organ of Him who is "the Truth,"— of Him "who, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto," is raised high above all human prejudice and passion?

"The Night of Weeping" is the subject before us. The story of David's great sin, of his deep repentance, of the gracious forgiveness which blotted out his offence, of the bitter punishment which followed hard on the heels of his crime,— this is to engage our solemn and reverent attention. And in pursuing the sad history, we are not called to look at David in a humble condition, tending his flock on the dewy hills; or David in adversity, hunted by Saul like a partridge on the mountains; but David reigning "over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba." For Jesse's son has been raised from obscurity to the throne; the shepherd boy has been made the anointed king. His prosperity has almost reached its culminating point. He has subdued many a foreign enemy, and overcome many a domestic foe. Warfare and

change have in a great measure given place to permanence and repose. In humble gratitude to God who "has given him rest round about from all his enemies," he proposes to erect a suitable temple to the Lord, wherein the ark may have a fitting home. This, however, God will not permit him to do; but He promises that his son shall build him an house, and He assures him further, of the stability of his throne and kingdom. And when David hears, through Nathan, this gracious promise, he goes in and sits before the Lord, and these are his words: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant." Such is David, humble, holy, thankful. A as man, "with enlarged heart he runs the way of God's commandments;" as a king, "he rules the people prudently with all his power." So well and wisely does he act, that "the Lord preserves him wheresoever he goes." He is kind to his friends, forgiving to his enemies. Such a man seems beyond the reach of temptation. He seems to dwell in an atmosphere so high and pure that we think he is above "the corruption that is in the world through

lust." If sin assail him, we believe that he will spurn it from him with abhorrence, and pass on his heavenward way unscathed and unharmed. Alas! we are deceived in our estimate of his character: here we may say, "Cease ye from man," for "wherein is he to be accounted of?" David is tempted, and falls. Overcome by a sudden and violent outburst of corruption, he yields his members to be the servants of sin. It is a dark and a bloody story, and the page which records it is one of the saddest in the Bible. The worldling may triumph when he reads it; the ungodly may scoff and sneer; the unbeliever may deny that there is any such thing as genuine religion, or true love to God; but the righteous will "stand in awe," and be afraid to sin. Ours be the prayer, taught in after days to His disciples by David's Son, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

In meditating on the story of the great sin of "the man after God's own heart," the question arises—What brought David within the reach of temptation? How happened it that he was caught in the snare of the fowler? Was there any cause to which might be traced so terrible, so grievous a fall? Even so. Neglected duties, self-indulgence, the seductious of ease, were the forerunners of greater sins, and prepared the way for crimes of darkest and deepest dye. "It came to pass, after

the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem." Why went not the king forth with his armies as usual? Why did he not buckle on his armour as of old, and carry the banner of his country into the thickest of the fight? What meant this tarrying at home, and sending others to endure the heat and burden and dangers of the war? Fatal indolence! It was the cause of all his after sin and sorrows. The standard-bearer falls. The strong man is shorn of his strength. As we see the king yielding to a guilty passion, and tempting the wife of Uriah to sin, we can only take up his own lament over Saul and Jonathan, and give it a yet sadder application: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

Oh! what a voice of warning rings in our ears from David's indolent tarrying at home when others had gone down to the battle, and its fearful results, bidding us beware of neglecting any duty; of shrinking from any self-denial; of seeking our own ease and indulgence, when we ought to be out

and fighting bravely the battles of the Lord. The Christian is called to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He may not devolve on others the duties of the field, and shrink from the wounds and watchings himself; or consult his own ease, or provide for his own pleasure. He is to take good heed that "his heart be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life;" and he is to "put on the whole armour of God, that he may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand." Woe unto him if he relax in the fight, or allow himself to be taken off his guard!

"Ill deeds are seldom single." No one, when yielding to the seductions of sin, can say to himself, "So far shalt thou go, and no farther." He that allows himself to commit the first sin, breaking through the barriers which have until this time kept him back from evil, is as a man who removes the embankment which has hitherto dammed up the current of an impetuous stream: when the restraint is removed, the gathered waters rush on with a resistless might, and sweep all before them in their flow. So David found it. He soon discovered that he was not able to pause in his downward course. Sin must needs be strengthened by sin.

The time comes when his guilty love for Bathsheba can no longer be concealed, and he has

recourse to every mean and despicable expedient in order to ward off the injured husband's suspicion. Uriah is sent for, and having returned from the camp, is treated with a pretence and show of honour. The king, with all cunning falsehood, seeks to play upon the soldier's simple integrity and unsuspecting manhood. "David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet." Uriah, however, follows not this counsel, but sleeps at the door of the king's house, with all the servants of his lord. When this is told to David in the morning, he inquires the cause: "Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down into thine house?" And right noble is the answer: "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing." But David, so far from being touched with the nobility of the man, hopes to overcome the sternness of his purpose by cunning. Being crafty, he will catch him by guile. He invites him to his table, and in the unguarded hour of festivity so plies him with wine that he makes him drunk. Oh, when we see David bringing upon himself the curse denounced by

the old prophet, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also," there is nothing left us to do, save that which Elisha did, when speaking with Hazael, "He settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept."

But even thus David does not gain his end. "Uriah goes out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but goes not down to his house." The royal culprit, foiled in his purpose, now meditates Uriah's death. He will get rid of Bath-sheba's husband: he will put him out of the way: and then he will have nothing to dread from the wronged and injured man. So resolving, he makes Uriah the unwitting messenger of his own death. He writes a letter, and with cold and heartless treachery sends it to Joab by Uriah's hand. That letter seals the bearer's doom; it is the death-warrant of Bath-sheba's husband. "Set ye Uriah,"—so runs the bloody despatch,—"set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." All falls out as the king desires. Joab "assigns Uriah unto a place where he knows that valiant men are;" and David's plots are brought to a triumphant consummation: for Uriah the Hittite, the object of his fears, is slain. Yes; the dark and cruel tragedy is played out; and David hastens to

secure the fruits of his wicked deed: for as soon as Bath-sheba's mourning for her husband is over, he sends and fetches her to his house, and she becomes his wife. So guilt triumphs. Uriah sleeps in a bloody grave, and the king enjoys the desired results of his complicated crime. It is a fearful story. It is a tale well fitted to make the reader shudder and tremble.

May we not pause with the reflection that the fall of this godly man proves that even in the best of men there are the remains of a corrupt and sinful nature; that even in them "the flesh lusteth against the spirit," and that they are liable at any time to disgrace their Christian profession if they forget to watch over the heart, "out of which are the issues of life." Let us not trust in any natural aversion to gross sin, or depend on our refinement of feeling, or purity of mind,—no, nor in any innate abhorrence of what is base and wicked; for nothing but the restraining grace of God can keep us from falling away. "Let him," saith the Apostle, "that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." With such an awful example before us as that of David, it becomes us "not to be high-minded, but to fear." Who will dare to assert that he is secure against the grossest and most flagrant of sins, when he reads how "the man after God's own heart" transgressed, and committed the most damning crimes? We are not told how long the

king's conscience slept; for what length of time he remained undisturbed in his sin. Months seemed to have passed, and still he lay in his guilty dream. This we know, however, his conscience would have slumbered on for ever—there would have been no movement towards contrition, had not God in His great mercy awakened him to repentance. Nathan, the prophet, is sent to the infatuated man, and by means of a beautiful and affecting parable sets before him the story of his crime. The dull conscience of the king, however, fails to recognize himself under the character of the rich man who, though he "had exceeding many flocks and herds," yet spared to take of them to dress for the wayfaring man that came unto his house; but took the poor man's "one little ewe lamb which he had bought, and nourished up; which did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." Failing to detect his own history in the prophet's parable, David's anger is kindled against the supposed offender, and he hastily exclaims, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." But what a horror of self-condemnation must have fallen upon his heart when he heard the solemn words of Nathan, as the prophet turned upon him and said, "Thou art the man!" And

then follows an enumeration of the terrible judgments which shall overtake him on account of his aggravated sins. The sword is never to depart from his house: discords, incests, murders, are to poison the springs of his happiness, are to throw their dark shadows over the pages of his after life. And David, conscience-stricken, filled with repentant anguish, brought to a sense of his guilt, confesses his iniquity, and exclaims, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." For in his blind wrath David had sworn, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die."

"The Lord hath put away thy sin." What? Is there, then, forgiveness for such crimes as these? Is there pardon for the adulterer and the murderer? Yes. When there is an unreserved confession of sin, there is forgiveness, the fullest, the freest, the most unlimited and large. "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The 51st Psalm, that outpouring of a broken spirit and contrite heart, shows us that David was a true penitent; that his was that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." In this he differed from Saul. In Saul's case, when he sinned, there was a rejection

of God: in David's case, when he sinned, his very unworthiness drove him to cast himself on God more unreservedly, with more entire trust in the all-sufficiency of His pardoning love. Oh, when we sin, let us follow the example of David in this, and go straight to God for pardon, and pour out with tears and cries before Him the confession of our sorrow. In the story of David's sin and repentance, there is hope for the chief of sinners. Christ is able, Christ is willing "to save to the uttermost all that cometh unto God by Him;" and "him that cometh He will in no wise cast out." "Christ died the just for the unjust;" "bore our sins in His own body on the tree;" "was made sin for us;" was "made a curse for us;" and because He paid all the penalty, the repentant sinner is saved all the punishment. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" from sins as well of the deepest, as of the lightest dye; it makes the scarlet white as snow, and the crimson pure as wool. Were it not so we might all despair, nor were the Gospel "glad tidings" to us!

But some objector says: "These views of Christianity minister encouragement to sin. If there be impunity to believer sin Christ, whatever the offences they commit, then they may proceed without fear to 'walk after the desire of their eyes,' and the lusts of their hearts!" May we not reply to this cavil in the indignant words of Paul, when to the

question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" he spake the quick, "God forbid! How shall we who are dead to sin, continue any longer therein?" And surely they who upbraid the Gospel method of forgiveness with giving encouragement to sin, must be dead to all the commonest feelings of gratitude and love, or they would know and feel that God's abounding mercy and grace are the strongest restraints upon the believer to hold him back from sin. But there is no occasion to use either of these arguments now. We may not forget that the history of David supplies us with a terrible answer to the objection, "That a righteous man may sin, and not be visited with punishment." David grievously offended, and David as grievously suffered. He was indeed a true penitent, and therefore he was graciously forgiven. He was not "cast away from God's presence," nor was "God's Holy Spirit taken from him." Nevertheless "he restored the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." All his life long he was the subject of the bitterest afflictions. "The sword departed not from his house;" among his children there were quarrels, rebellion, incests, murders: among his subjects, treason, famine, pestilence,—all proving God's righteous abhorrence of sin, and that "He is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity." And besides all this, no sooner had Nathan assured David that "the Lord had

put away his sin," than he added, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." And it was so. "The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them." The child of David's sin was made the instrument of David's punishment.

Can you picture the agony of remorse which must have been his as he lay that night on the bare earth, fasting and weeping, and refusing to be comforted? How poignant his feelings of self-reproach! How deep his humiliation! How bitter his lamentations! Look at David prostrate on the ground, and, "with strong crying and tears," pleading all the night through for the life of his child, and pleading in vain; think how the remainder of his days were darkened by the shadows of his crime, and learn that the man of God cannot sin with impunity, and that God will "visit the transgression of His people with a rod." Nay, remember how God made the peculiar relationship in which His own people, Israel, stood to Him, the very reason why their every offence should be so

visited. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." It is because God loves His people that He takes the pains to rebuke and chasten them. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions," is David's own account of God's dealings with Moses, and Aaron, and Samuel. And it is in mercy that God will not permit sin in His servants: that if you are His people, He will not permit sin in you. No; rather than that He will take the rod and scourge you for your offences, just as an earthly parent would take the rod and scourge his child for some vice, lying, dishonesty, or disobedience. And the more He loves you, the heavier the blow will fall: for He would have you perfect and pure—"a partaker of His holiness." Can there be a doubt that many of the afflictions of God's people may be referred back to their sins? Not that there is anything *penal* in the chastisements which they endure. No; they are simply *corrective*. They are tokens, not of God's wrath, but of God's love. Alas! we bring them upon ourselves, and it would be for our own happiness did we not need the painful discipline. How many of our personal and domestic trials may we not trace to our own wilful departure from the law of God? Some alliance which has been formed in defiance of His will—some habits which have been

allowed in opposition to His Word—some scheme of ambition or avarice—some worldly compromise —some step taken in accordance with what seemed expedient, but which would not stand the test of the unbending right,—these may have brought their own punishment, in disquiet, calamity, and sorrow. And well it is that the world, which sees the faults and failings of the saints, but which cannot see them weeping bitterly in secret, and seeking fresh cleansing in the Saviour's blood—that the world should know, that while God freely forgives the penitent, He does not spare sin even in His own; He does not connive at it, but ever exhibits so thorough a hatred of iniquity, that He will not let it pass unnoticed by the rod. Was not this one reason for the open punishment that fell on David when his child was stricken unto death? "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." For the interests of morality, for the glory of God's great name, the world must be taught that it is "an evil and a bitter thing" to depart from God—that sin is none the less vile in His eyes, perhaps all the viler, when seen in His own people—that He is no blind, weak, or over-indulgent Parent, who will palliate or tolerate iniquity just because it happens to be committed by one of His own children. And surely it should

make the sinner pause and reflect in his careless career when he beholds God showing, in this impartial manner, his abhorrence of sin; for may we not ask, "If judgment first begins at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" Nay, let the ungodly remember a more illustrious example still of God's righteous abhorrence of iniquity. Take your stand under the cross. Look to His own Son dying on the tree; see Jehovah passing the sharp sword through the bleeding bosom of His Fellow! Behold those sufferings, listen to those cries, and say, have you not, in the cross of Christ, the strongest and most affecting proof that God will not allow sin to go unpunished? If He "spared not His own Son," will He spare thee, oh, unbelieving and impenitent man, who dost "count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doest despite to the Spirit of Grace!" "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Such are some of the truths which may be drawn from "The Night of Weeping." May God bless them to our "instruction in righteousness!"

There is another lesson still to be learnt from this most interesting episode in David's history. It is the consolation with which David comforted himself when, on the seventh day from its illness, the child died. So great had been his sorrow during the time of the child's sickness, that when

all was over his servants feared to tell him that the child was dead; for "they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice; how will he, then, vex himself if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead; therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; then he came to his own house, and when he required they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants, What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive, but when the child was dead thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." We have in these latter words David's clear and assured hope of the life beyond death. Nay, we have in his expressed expectation of being hereafter with his departed child, a testimony to the recognition of the saints in the world to come. This doctrine

of the recognition of departed friends hereafter has been doubted by some, — denied by others. Why, it is hard to say. For surely we shall lose none of our faculties or capacities in heaven. Memory will not become a void—a blank. We are rather to have increased strength and powers of perception in the kingdom of our Father; the organs and senses whereby we gather in knowledge will be heightened, and intensified, and enlarged. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known." Again, what is there in the change that we shall undergo to prevent our mutual recognition in glory? We shall always maintain our separate and individual identity; we shall be the same persons in heaven that we are on earth,— transformed, indeed, the corruptible clothed with incorruption, but not different from our former selves. On the summit of Mount Tabor, our Lord, though wondrously transfigured, was still known to his disciples, who also were able intuitively to recognize Moses and Elias, who appeared with the Saviour in glory. Many are the passages in Scripture which hold forth to our hopes the recognition of our loved ones in heaven. Recall the promise of our Lord, that "many shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God,"—and the consolation

offered by St. Paul to the bereaved, when he strove to comfort their mourning hearts with the assurance, "Them that sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him at His coming." Surely the history of the rich man and Lazarus, in which Dives, after his death, "seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom," is a further confirmation of this doctrine; as likewise that statement of the Apostle concerning his converts, in which he tells them that they shall be "his joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming." Indeed, this blessed doctrine appears so obvious and simple — so plainly assumed throughout the whole of Scripture—so much a matter of instinct, that the wonder is there can exist in the minds of any the shadow of a doubt on the subject. Let the person who doubts or denies this doctrine go to the royal palace at Jerusalem, and catch the truth from the lips of King David, as, no longer weeping over his dead child, he comforts himself with the beautiful and touching words, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

"I shall go to him!" Most glorious hope! How often it has penetrated like a bright ray of light into the darkened chamber of death, scattering and dispelling the gloom! Oh, it does much to take away the sting from death!—it does much to destroy the victory of the grave. All who have loved and lost—and who has not?—know the joy

of believing that those who are "absent from the body and present with the Lord," are only gone home a little before, and that we shall join them in the family circle above. What a reunion will that be!

Even in this world there are many gatherings which contribute very largely to our gladness. How pleasant it is when all the members of a large, scattered family meet again! How quickly the hearts of the absent beat in the very anticipation of such a time!—and how happily go the hours when those who have been long separated reassemble once more in frank and confiding intercourse, to recount the tale of their experience since last they met,—when loving and loved faces are gathered again under a father's roof! This is one of the purest joys upon earth. But such happy circles must again be broken, and even the pleasure which is then felt is sometimes largely alloyed with pain. There are imperfections and frailties which mar the holiest season of intercourse; and since the last reunion some well-remembered faces and forms may be missing; some are dead, some are absent; and ere another meeting it may have to be said of others in that happy group, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Benjamin is taken away." But it shall not be so in heaven. *That* family circle shall never be broken. No imperfection shall disturb the happiness of that faultless

assembly. "Nothing shall be seen but joy and gladness; nothing heard but thanksgiving and the voice of melody." Oh, it should rejoice the heart to think of living throughout the noon of the eternal day with those whom we loved on earth—of uniting with them in singing the praises of God, and joining our voices with theirs in the adoring song, "Salvation to God that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever!" What "fulness of joy" it will be, with affections not destroyed, but refined and purified, to renew the sweet counsel we have formerly taken together—to retrace all the steps of the way by which God hath led us—to recount its toils and labours, its sorrows and its gladness—to see how "all things worked together for our good"—to observe how the "light affliction, which was but for a moment, has worked for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"—and to acknowledge, with a burst of thankfulness and praise, that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenants and His testimonies." Let the Christian mourner be comforted by such a prospect as this. When God "takes from you the sight of your eyes," then, instead of being "swallowed up with over-much sorrow," let the consolation wherewith David consoled himself be yours. As ye rise up from the ground where ye have been weeping, "making supplication with

strong crying and tears" for the life that was so dear — the life that has not been given to your prayers,—let some such words as these be on your lips, "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

CHAPTER XIV.

The Night of the Assyrians' Doom.

"A THOUSAND SHALL FALL AT THY SIDE, AND TEN THOUSAND AT THY RIGHT HAND: BUT IT SHALL NOT COME NIGH THEE; ONLY WITH THINE EYES SHALT THOU BEHOLD, AND SEE THE REWARD OF THE WICKED."

"And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."—2 KINGS XIX. 35.

The Night of the Assyrians' Doom.

Ahaz, a wicked man and king, was succeeded on the throne of Judah by his son Hezekiah. When the new reign began, there was much need of a reformation throughout the land: many and sweeping changes had been necessary; the torrent of iniquity needed to be stemmed; for during the sixteen years of the rule of Ahaz, "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel: and he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree." Wickedness was not confined to the court; the nation learnt to imitate the morals of the palace; a corrupting influence descended from the higher to the lower classes, and the leaven leavened the whole lump. "The children of Israel sinned against the Lord their God," and "walked in the statutes

of the heathen;" they "set up images and groves in every high hill and under every green tree, and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger."

Hezekiah had an arduous task before him, and he set himself manfully to achieve it. Right noble is the character given of this king. "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses." As a consequence of his loving regard for the law of God, the Divine blessing rested richly upon him. "The Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth." It had been the unrighteous act of his father Ahaz to place the nation under the yoke of the Assyrians, and to make it bend to a foreign rule. This dishonourable servitude could not be endured for a moment by a king who was zealous for God's honour; and therefore Hezekiah determined to emancipate his people from this base dominion, and to make them free as of old. "He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." This was in the early years of his accession to the throne, and when Shalmanezer held the Assyrian sceptre. But in the fourteenth year of his reign, Sennacherib, who succeeded Shalmanezer, came

up to Judæa with an invading army. Hezekiah, fearing the issue of the invasion, sends an embassy to him with a humble message, confessing that he had offended, that he was penitent, and that he was willing to bear any impost that might be placed upon him, provided only the Assyrian army was withdrawn. Sennacherib demands a sum so considerable that the treasures of the kingdom are exhausted in its payment. Three hundred talents of silver, and thirty talents of gold, is the amount exacted by the enemy. Hezekiah gives him "all the silver that is found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house;" nay, in his extremity, he cuts off the gold from the doors of the temple, and from the pillars, and sends it to the Assyrian king. We can only condemn Hezekiah for this conduct. Was it not an unrighteous thing to enrich the revenues of idolators by the silver and the gold which had been stripped from the temple of God? Was there no sacrilege in so collecting the tax levied by the foe? Why, since he nobly threw off the yoke of the Assyrian before, not go forth and meet the invader in the field, and, in the strength of the Lord, drive him back, routed and discomfited, home? He made an unholy concession; and he finds, to his confusion, it utterly fails of its object. Like all measures of carnal expediency—like all sinful compromises—it but paves the way for further disaster.

Sennacherib, so far from being satisfied with the full payment of the tax, has only his appetite whetted for further spoil, and sets his heart on taking Jerusalem. He sends his commanding officers, with a great host, against the holy city; and Rab-shakeh, from beneath the walls, delivers to Hezekiah's ambassadors a message of insult and defiance, and demands the surrender of the capital. He tells them that resistance is useless; that other nations were completely subdued; that their God could not deliver them; and that the God of Israel could not save His worshippers out of the hand of one so powerful as his master. When Hezekiah hears these vaunting words, he covers himself with sackcloth, rends his clothes, and repairs to the house of the Lord. His trouble teaches him where to look for succour. He sends Eliakim, his steward and treasurer, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, in mourning garments to Isaiah, to entreat his counsel and ask his prayers. The prophet sends them back to the king with words of encouragement, telling him not to be afraid, and announcing the defeat of the enemy. Hezekiah has much need of such a promise to uphold him in his dire distress; for Sennacherib, enraged that tidings of submission have not reached him from Jerusalem, sends the king a letter filled with language of defiance and scorn. There are in it, too, great boasting words against

the God of heaven:—"Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Henah, and Ivah?" Such are the boasting words of this written missive to the king. Hezekiah reads it, and then what does he? There is no summoning of chamberlain, and recorder, and scribe, to his councils. There are no hasty plans devised and executed. Wise measures and deliberate precautions may follow in due season; but the first thing which the king does is to "go up into the house of the Lord, and spread the letter before the Lord." And then flows from the heart and lips of the devout king the sublime and beautiful prayer, childlike in its simplicity and fervent in its appeal: "O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of

Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only."

Let us pause here to consider Hezekiah's refuge in time of trouble.

How beautiful in their very simplicity are the words,—"He received the letter at the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." Alone—attendants not summoned, ministers of state left behind, no human eye to see, no human ear to hear—the king went up to the place where, in ancient days, and under that dispensation, God especially dwelt, and where His glory was manifested in an especial manner; and there—as friend to Friend, as child to Father—he poured out his cares. "He opened the letter before the Lord;" the whole sheet was unfolded, the contents made known. He did to God as we do to our friends when tidings have come by the post which cause us trouble or grief, or fill us with perplexity: we place the letter in their hands, and

ask them to read it, and to tell us what they think of the intelligence it conveys. But only to our closest and most intimate friends do we act in this way; we allow not a stranger to enter into our griefs, or to intermeddle with our joys. And if so, do we not learn that Hezekiah regarded God as his truest Friend and wisest Counsellor? Are we not taught that his communion with his Father in heaven was real, deep, open, and confiding? He had a conscious fellowship with God; and in the enjoyment of this privilege he was enabled to unbosom all his griefs and make known all his sorrows.

Now, here we have a model for our prayers; here we see what the Christian life ought to be—free and frank intercourse with Him to whom we are reconciled by the precious blood of the cross, and who "has shed abroad in our hearts the spirit of adoption, whereby we can say, Abba, Father." God longs for the trust on our part which would lay bare before Him all the heart; He craves our confidence; He invites us to cast all our care on Him, and gives us the assurance that He careth for us. He says graciously, "Be careful for nothing: but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And oh, what words are these,—"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in

truth"; "Call upon me, and I will answer thee"! Therefore take all your anxieties, your perplexities, your troubles, your cares, and "spread" them before the Lord. He is near to you now—near to you at every moment; He watches every secret movement of your souls, rejoicing when He sees you coming to Him as children to a Father able and ready to help them in the time of need—when He sees you, without a doubt, without a misgiving, resting assured that "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And what a privilege this—to be permitted to ally our weakness with His strength; our emptiness with His fulness! What a privilege, to be allowed to cast our burthen of sin or sorrow on our God, and to lift up the cry of want in the ear of Him who has promised to "supply all our need out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"! Oh, grasp your privilege; let it not be offered to you in vain; make full use of it. Away—when the heart is sad or anxious, sick with sorrow, or oppressed with sin—away to the mercy-seat; and let your posture be that of Hezekiah with the letter in his hand, when, in conscious nearness to God, he lifted up his voice and said, "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, and thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes,

and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God."

"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims." Mark the ground of the king's petition. It was a God in covenant that he sought; he made a direct appeal to a promise which God gave to His people Israel. "Thou shalt make a mercy-seat," said God to Moses, "of pure gold, and make a cherub on the one end, and a cherub on the other end: and thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark: and there will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony." We have a fulfilment of this promise in the seventh chapter of the Book of Numbers, and at the eighty-ninth verse, where it is written that Moses "heard the voice of one speaking to him from off the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubims." And we have a reference to it in the eightieth Psalm, where David praying says, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth"; and again, in the ninety-ninth Psalm, where he uses the sublime words, "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved." The "mercy-seat" was the golden covering of the ark, on which the high

priest every year sprinkled the blood which atoned for the nation's sins; and at the two extremities of this golden covering were placed the cherubims, their faces turned toward each other, and bending downwards, in the act of adoration. When, therefore, Hezekiah appealed to "the God of Israel, who dwelt between the cherubims," he not only had in mind the glory and greatness of God, but also His goodness and graciousness in opening up a way of access to Himself through the sprinkling of the atoning blood. The mercy-seat, overshadowed by the cherubims, assured him that his prayer would be heard when he cried to God for pardon of his sin, or besought the Divine help in the pressing time of trouble.

And can we use the same prayer,—O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims"? Where are the cherubims? Where is the mercy-seat? They have passed away with all the peculiar institutions of Judaism. The glory of symbol, the beauty of type, exist no longer; they are gone. But a higher glory has taken their place; a richer beauty has been substituted. We mourn not for the altar, and the incense, and the bleeding sacrifice, and the ministering priest; we regret not the loss of the worldly tabernacle, or the golden candlestick, or the mercy-seat, or cherubim, or the other ordinances of the gorgeous ritual of Moses: we have the substance

instead of the shadow, the reality instead of the symbol. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." And that Son, having atoned for all our transgressions by His death upon the cross, "entered not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us"; and, through His ever living intercession, the worship and the petitions of sinful men are acceptable to God. We may come to the throne of grace with even more boldness than the Jew of old; for in Christ Jesus the mercy and compassion of God are associated, not with the shadow and the symbol, but with the reality and the completion of atonement. And what then? Hear the Apostle:— "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Come to the throne of grace, not timidly, not with doubts and fears, and a wavering mind,

but "come boldly," that you "may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

"In time of need!" And is not every time with us "a time of need"? We are sinful, and we need pardon; unholy, and we need sanctification; dark, and we need light; ignorant, and we need instruction; foolish, and we need wisdom; troubled, and we need consolation. As the Assyrians pressed upon Jerusalem, so do our enemies press upon us, and we need help and deliverance; we need a refuge and a stronghold from the foe. And we have one ever near: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." At all times near, He is doubly near in our times of sorrow—so near, that when we weep He gathers up our "tears," and "puts them into His bottle"; so near, that when we are ill He "makes all our bed in our sickness"; so near, that when we are brought to the gates of the grave, "the everlasting arms are beneath us"; so near, that when the waves and the storms rage all around, and threaten to overwhelm us, we are able to catch the words, heard clearly above all the noise of the water-spouts, "Fear not, for I am with thee: be not afraid, for I am thy God." Oh, the blessedness, the blessedness of this filial access to our Father in heaven! Child of God! what do you wish or want? What is your difficulty, or anxiety, or trouble, or care? Go, tell it to your Father.

"They that seek the Lord shall not want for any good thing." "He will send them help from His holy place; He will evermore defend them." Therefore fear not to draw on God's promises; the supply will ever be equal to the demand. You cannot hope too much, or ask too much. The words stand sure: "My God shall supply all your need out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." When trouble is hard at hand, and care oppresses; when danger threatens, or poverty comes against you like an armed man; when the barrel of meal is about to waste, and the cruse of oil to fail; when some dread anxiety sits heavy on the heart, go at once to God, as did Hezekiah, who, "when he had received the letter from the hand of the messenger, went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord."

We know how, in answer to Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord interfered on his behalf. The presumptuous Assyrian had defied the Most High; and the God of Israel, who dwelt beneath the cherubims, comes out of His place to prove that He is not as one of the gods of Hamath, and Arpad, and Sepharvaim, and Hena, and Ivah; but that "He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth." Isaiah was commissioned to send this message to Hezekiah,—"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib,

king of Assyria, I have heard. This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." The promise was followed at once by performance. "It came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

On that Night of Doom, thousands retired to rest who never opened their eyes to the light of day. From tent to tent passed the minister of death. Never more shall the hands of these sleepers draw the sword, or lift the lance, or brace the helmet. At the blasting of the breath of the angel's displeasure their strength is turned into feebleness,

their glory into corruption. The pride of Assyria is brought down even to the dust; her honour is laid prostrate on the ground; her captains, and her chief men, and her mighty men, and her men of renown — the flower of her chivalry and the chief of her strength—perish in the darkness and the silence of one avenging night. With shame and grief and fruitless rage, the king of Assyria, leaving behind him the multitudinous host that he led against Jerusalem, returned to Nineveh; and there, while worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god, he is slain by the unnatural hands of his own sons. So perish all the enemies of the Lord; while they that love Him are "as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

I gather from this remarkable story, that no weapon formed against the Church shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against her in judgment God shall condemn. The enemy may muster in proud and hostile array; they may "take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed"; but "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." They can no more defeat His purposes than they can pluck yonder sun from the heavens, or arrest the lightning in its path, or "bind the secret influence of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion"; nay, they can accomplish nothing which God does not permit; they can

go no farther in their own way than the Lord giveth them chain; they are wholly in His hands —entirely subject to His control. He may use the wicked, as He often does, for the chastisement of His people, and as instruments for effecting His wise purposes—for "the wicked are His sword"; but when the end which He has in view is accomplished, He casts them aside like a broken bow which is of no further use. He that says to the proud waves of ocean, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further"—He that presides over the tempest as well as over the calm—makes subservient to His own purposes alike the rebellion and the obedience of His creatures. To employ the remarkable expression of the Psalmist, "Surely the wrath of men shall praise Him: the remainder of wrath shall He restrain." This is our encouragement when the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing: we know and are sure that their vain enmity shall conduce to the glory of God and the good of His people. Was it not so in the case of the Jews and Pontius Pilate, of Judas and Herod, and the chief priests? Supposing that they were their own free masters, and that they were carrying out their own passions and purposes, they were all the time moving under the control of God, and just doing that which, by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge, was appointed to be done.

"Trust then in the Lord for ever, for in the

Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Go thy way, assured that thou shalt be made "more than conqueror" when "the Assyrian" comes against thee and would assail thy true peace. Child of God! He who has numbered the stars of heaven, has numbered the hairs of thy head, and will so overrule the course of your fortune that whatever befal thee — come joy or sorrow — "all things shall work together for your good." Hard indeed it is, and harassing, to be pursued by enemies all through life—to have a daily fight with sin and sorrow, temptation and fear and doubt, and the devil; but the hour is drawing nigh when they shall vex and harass no more; when the "last enemy" himself shall be destroyed. You shall yet stand on the shores of time, and, leaving life, shall leave every foe behind; you shall see them again no more for ever; and as the other world opens upon you, and you look onward into its glorious depths, nothing shall meet your eye but joy and gladness, nothing fall on your ear but thanksgiving and the voice of melody. No enemy shall cross the threshold of the New Jerusalem, or set foot in heaven: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

CHAPTER XV.

The Night of Prayer.

"ASK, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL."

"In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee."—1 KINGS III. 5.

The Night of Prayer.

"Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours," is as true of the generation as it is of the individual. One age sows what another reaps. We "reap in joy" what the men of a past day have "sown in tears." The laborious thought of those who have gone before has procured for us our present knowledge. Their hard-fought battles against oppression have won for us the civil and religious freedom which is our noblest birthright. Of many a privilege which blesses our country and brightens our homes, it may be said, "We reap that whereon we bestowed no labour."

The peace and prosperity which prevailed in Israel when Solomon ascended the throne, was a remarkable illustration of this truth. David's had been a life of warfare — a long struggle with domestic enemies and external foes. Trouble and disquietude, battle and bloodshed, feuds and rivalries, crime and punishment, marked the days of

his reign. But the former things had now passed away, and the warrior, before he entered into his rest, bequeathed a peaceful kingdom to his son. The ark of God, no longer a wanderer from place to place, was to find a permanent home in a temple builded for the Lord. So Solomon, a man of peace, ascends a throne of peace. The youthful king commences well his prosperous reign. He goes up to do sacrifice at Gibeon, a city situated amongst the highest hills of Judæa, and distant a few miles from Jerusalem. At Gibeon was the tabernacle and the altar of burnt-offering, and thither accordingly Solomon resorts to worship the Lord his God. He gives to God with no narrow heart—with no niggard hand. Right nobly does he render back to the Lord of the rich and abundant gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon him. No less than a thousand burnt-offerings does he present in solemn sacrifice upon the holy altar. In this sacred act of worship passes the hours of the day. The king finds it to be "good for him to draw nigh unto God." "In the great congregation he blesses the Lord," and "offers in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy." A day so spent cannot but be followed by a night of contentment and peace. So Solomon finds it. In that night did God appear unto the king in a dream, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." And Solomon, in reply to this generous invitation, puts forth his

prayer. Having first acknowledged God's goodness in the great mercy He had shown to his father David while he was alive, and in the great kindness which He had displayed in giving him a son to sit on his throne, he then makes his request: "And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" Such—so wise, so humble—is Solomon's petition on this "Night of Prayer." We are not surprised to hear that it "pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing." His reply to the king's request displayed His satisfaction: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches

and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." This was God's gracious promise in answer to Solomon's prayer. No wonder, when the king awoke from his dream or vision, that he returned from Gibeon to Jerusalem, and standing before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, "offered up burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants." The gratitude of a thankful heart could not rest satisfied without an outward expression of its swelling emotions of joy.

But having thus considered the incidents of this interesting "night-scene," let us now turn to inquire what lessons are to be derived from it which may prove "profitable for instruction in righteousness."

There are three points in the narrative which are worthy of careful attention. First, there is God's offer, "Ask what I shall give thee." Secondly, there is Solomon's choice, "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." Thirdly, there is God's promise, "Behold, I have done according to thy words." "And I have also given the ethat which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour."

First. God's offer, "Ask what I shall give thee."

In what a noble character is God here presented to our notice! How munificent! How bountiful! The Lord of heaven and earth—He who claims as His own "every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills"—"the world and the fulness thereof"—the silver and the gold which lie embedded in earth's richest mines—He who has only to "open his hand, and to fill all things living with plenteousness,"—this mighty Being says to his servant Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee." Most gracious God, to make such an offer! Most favoured man, who had such an offer at his disposal!

But is God less bounteous, less liberal, now to His people? Are His gifts exhausted? Is His heart narrowed? Are His promises straitened? Nay; not so. Has He not said, through the mouth of that well-beloved Son who has revealed His character to men, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"? Christ, in His Father's name, offers His people everything they can need. His bounty is inexhaustible. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name believing, that shall ye receive." His promises are unlimited. His offers of grace are restricted by no terms or conditions; He makes no exceptions; there are no "buts" or "ifs" in

His covenant engagements. Spreading the wealth of earth and heaven before the believer, and placing it at his acceptance, He says: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Can we want any assurance wider or broader than this? Can we require any promise larger or more liberal? Gracious and most blessed words! "Ask, and it shall be given you!" Words pregnant with the strongest consolation—the richest encouragement! For, if in answer to prayer there is nothing that we need that we shall not get — nothing that we can ask that we shall not receive, why should fears alarm or cares distress? Everything that belongs to God,— His grace, strength, wisdom, love,—is drawn down from heaven by the golden cords of prayer into the hands of the humblest of His children. No vain or empty words are these. Many a child of God has found their truth realised in his own happy experience. In times of weakness prayer has brought him strength. In moments of darkness prayer has given him light. In seasons of sorrow prayer has ministered consolation. In hours of anxiety prayer has brought him peace. What Christian deserving the name has not found this to be the case? Let him who disbelieves the power of prayer, or doubts the goodness of God, fear that he knows not God as He ought to know Him, and that never yet has he offered up prayer aright. But, child of God! who art no stranger

at the throne of grace — whose knees have often bent before the mercy-seat — whose voice is a familiar one in the ears of thy Father, believe that "all thy need shall be supplied out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What is it that thou dost wish or want? Go, carry the desire to Him who of His right royal bounty has said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Go and discover the truth of the promise, "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." Why should we fear that the blessing which we wish for will be withheld? Is there a seal placed on the fountain of living waters? Are the wells of salvation dried up? Is the treasury of heaven emptied of its stores? Fear not. Yonder sun shall be shorn of his glory, the moon shall be unsphered from her place in the sky, stars shall fall from a dissolving firmament, heaven and earth shall pass away, before one jot or one tittle of His promises can fail, who is "able to do exceeding abundantly for you above all you can ask or think." Whatsoever be your wants— whether you wish more faith or more fervour, more light or more love, more purity or more peace, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." You may see a figure of God's goodness in the widow's cruse of oil, which never failed, and in her barrel of meal, which never grew less. Extend your desires as you may, you cannot ask more

than He is willing to confer from that ever-loving God, who says to His people now, as He said to Solomon of old, placing Himself and all that He has at their disposal, "Ask what I shall give thee."

There are some in the present day, as there have been some in all ages of the world, who, from the heights of a carnal wisdom, look with a scornful pity on those who expect an answer to prayer. They charge us with being superstitious, and maintain that the uniformity of nature forbids us to expect any interference with her unalterable laws. The doctrine of a special providence—a providence which is as varied as the manifold necessities of the human family—forms no part of their creed; and God is divorced from the control of that universe which He summoned into being. Cold, cold is such philosophy, and as shallow as it is cold! Do not give credit to it for a moment. What! has God, who has made prayer an instinct, a necessity of the heart, made no provision for its yearning aspirations? See how such an argument dishonours the good and gracious God. For does not such a representation of His character prove Him to be wanting both in love and wisdom, since thus all in vain has He bestowed upon us one of the deepest cravings of our nature? Amongst all the other feelings and affections which belong to us men, put your hand on one for which its own fitting satisfac-

tion has not been provided by a God who "doeth all things well." And does this necessity of prayer stand isolated and alone, the only discord amongst the other harmonies of our nature? Away with the thought! And, independently of this, can we entertain for a moment the thought that God, having framed the world, and stamped upon it certain laws, then left it so entirely to its own guardianship and guidance that He exercises no control over its government, or over the course of its events? Is the universe like a watch, which, being once wound up, is permitted to go on without any further superintendence of its mechanism and machinery? Again must it be said, Away with the thought! Be not deceived by "a vain philosophy," or by "science falsely so called." There is a higher than all human philosophy in the teaching of our Bibles when, telling us that God has left us room for both faith and prayer, they exhort us "in everything to make our requests known unto God." Prayer has been answered; prayer will be answered again; not, indeed, by a miracle, but by the agency of those secondary causes through which God works the designs of His holy will, and yet does no violence to the uniformity of nature.

Take an illustration of this. For three years the heavens have been shut up, so that no rain has fallen upon the parched ground; the earth languishes; the fig-tree putteth not forth her

blossoms, neither does the vine bend beneath the purple grapes; the labour of the olive fails; the golden corn falls not to the sickle of the reaper; and gaunt famine stalks through the land. Elijah prays, and He of whom it is said, "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that He did in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places: He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings for the rain; He bringeth the wind out of His treasures;"—He lends a ready ear to the prophet's cry. The famine is stayed, not by bread sent down from heaven, but by the breaking of the gathered clouds, and the falling of a gracious rain on the thirsty fields, which causes the seed to spring up, and to bud and blossom, and to bring forth fruit an hundredfold.

And so of other prayers. The prayer of the man who is stretched upon a bed of pain is answered, not by a sudden restoration to strength, as when the Saviour spake the word, and the centurion's son was healed; but by another method, through which the Almighty gives us equal testimony to His power. He sends a blessing on the means which are used, the medicines that are given, the remedies applied, as in the case of Hezekiah, when the king wept sore, and prayed that he might not die, but live.

Prayer always commands an answer. "The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth

much." Let no one rob us of our faith in its power. Dark would be our life without it; hapless our lot, wanting such a solace. Pray on, pray ever. You may not receive the answer at once; your faith and patience may be put on their trial; but neither despond nor despair: "wait on the Lord," and in His own time the answer will come. "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not." And never forget to take as your pattern, when praying, Him who in the dark hour of His agony, after saying, "If it be possible let this cup pass away," added, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done!" The answer may not be given in the shape that you desire or expect; nay, it may come in the form of a denial; but, however it come, it will come in the way most conducive to your welfare. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." If the boon that you ask for be withheld, rest assured it would not be "good" for you to have it. Should we not place in our heavenly Father the same trust that we expect our children to place in us? And do we not require them to believe that all that will promote their happiness shall be given them, and only the hurtful be denied? And of this, who is the best judge, the child or the parent? We, or our Father in heaven? Then bless God, who "seeth the end from the beginning," that He reserves in His own wise and loving hands the power of grant-

ing or refusing our requests, and rest assured that He will do in every case just that which is best. At the same time be assured that with regard to *spiritual* blessings, to all that concerns your advance in grace and your growth in holiness, there are no bounds or limits to the offer, "Ask what I shall give thee."

But, secondly, there comes under consideration the choice of Solomon on this night when God placed at his disposal all the riches and honours, all the glory and grandeur of the world. Most munificent was the offer, "Ask what I shall give thee." It was also a mighty test wherewith to try what was in a man's heart, and few would have passed the ordeal as Solomon did. Not for pomp or splendour, not for length of days or the life of his enemies, was his prayer. Undazzled by crowns, and thrones, and sceptres, — by the power and parade that would have had attractions for a mind less exalted, less nobly endowed, he only asks for wisdom. Feeling that "the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold; that she is more precious than rubies: and all the things he can desire are not to be compared with her," he prays, "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" Nor was he selfish in his request.

He did not ask for wisdom with the desire for intellectual greatness, or that he might reign supreme in the dominion of mind. He was thinking of the subjects for whose good he was to rule. "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad."

You will be able to estimate more truly the greatness exhibited by Solomon in his prayer, if you will place yourself in his position. Imagine for a moment that God makes you the large, the limitless offer,—laying at your feet the riches of the universe, — and saying, "Ask what I shall give thee." What a revealer would such a proposal be of the thoughts and intents of your heart! What a crucible to test your principles! Which of us could stand the ordeal? Had our hearts audible language, how various the answers that would be returned! In the course of your reading you may have met with a tale which gives an account of a certain "Palace of Truth," within whose walls every person was compelled to utter the thought which was in his heart. For the time, all who entered there were constrained to be true. The ready-formed lie died away on the lips. The hollow flattery could not be spoken. The varnished courtesy was checked upon the tongue, and the real sentiment sprang spontaneous from the heart, and made itself heard, perhaps to

the confusion of the speaker. Suppose that any congregation in this Christian land were gathered into such a palace instead of assembling as usual in a church, what would be the reply of its members to the proposal, "Ask what I shall give thee"? One might say, "Give thy servant success in his ventures, that the silver and the gold may flow into my coffers; let my gains be large, and my profits certain." Another might ask, "Lord, raise me to rank and station amongst men; place me on a pinnacle of greatness, and satisfy the ambitious yearnings of my soul." A third might pray, "Lord, give me health and strength, a vigorous frame, a powerful mind, a body capable of activity and endurance." Another might grasp greedily at some coveted possession which he fancied would secure his happiness; while another might implore that the lost should be restored to the arms from which they had been torn, and to the home they had left desolate by their death. And some—oh, would not some!—if God placed the riches of heaven and earth at their feet, the wealth of the universe at their disposal, ask for a deeper acquaintance with His love, a larger measure of His Spirit; for a greater growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? Perhaps, with a heart thirsting after the living God, they would say, with Moses, "Shew me thy glory;" or, with Philip, "Lord, shew us

the Father, and it sufficeth us." Happy they whose "affections are so set on things above," whose "treasures are so laid up in heaven," that, beyond all others, spiritual blessings are desired—"bags that wax not old," and "pleasures that are for evermore!" Thrice happy they whose greatest anxieties are associated with the Divine life; with the things that belong to their everlasting peace; with faith, and hope, and love; with higher attainments in holiness, and an ever-advancing conformity to the will of God. To be rising heavenward was all the desire and all the endeavour of St. Paul. With a marvellous concentration of purpose, throwing all his energies into the effort, he could say of himself, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Are you conscious of such earnestness as this in the heavenly race? Child of God! if so, "this is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes." Believer, rejoice! It is God who is thus "working in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure." Happy, thrice happy are they who, in all their approaches to the throne of grace, make "the wisdom that cometh down from above" their chief object and supreme desire; who, when kneeling there, say with Solomon, "Give thy

servant an understanding heart that I may discern between good and bad."

But the third truth which remains to be considered is, God's promise in answer to Solomon's prayer. "The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." How amply these promises were fulfilled is known to every reader of Solomon's after life. "Solomon's wisdom," it is stated, "excelled all the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round

about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." When the Queen of Sheba, who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom, had put to the test the fame of which she had heard, she said to the king, "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. And, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom." And not only had Solomon wisdom beyond all the sons of men, but his "riches, and wealth, and honour" were such as none of the kings that went before him, or came after him, possessed. Most wonderful is the description in the ninth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles of the magnificence of Solomon: of his powerful alliances: his superb edifices: the extent of his kingdom: the house which he built: his throne of ivory and gold: his horses, and chariots, and servants; the silver which he made in Jerusalem

as common as stones, and the cedar trees which he made as plenty as sycamores: and all his glory which grew into a proverb throughout all countries of the world. Thus did God do far more than fulfil his promise to Solomon on that "Night of Prayer," when the king in reply to the offer, "Ask what I shall give thee," said, "O Lord, my God, give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad."

Is there anything to be learnt from the munificent answer which God returned to Solomon's prayer? Much, very much. Does it not throw a bright light over the promise, that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"? He not only supplies our necessities, He exceeds them: not only meets our wants, but surpasses them. The same truth was taught by our Lord to His disciples, when, exhorting them not to be unduly anxious about "what they should eat, and what they should drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed," He said, "But seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Solomon sought *first* wisdom and understanding, and God added besides, riches and honour. How true it is that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is," as well as "of that which is to come!" Not that the children of God are to

expect, as their necessary portion, much worldly prosperity or success: name or fame amongst men; greatness, and grandeur, and glory. All that Christ promises is a *sufficiency*. "All these things,"—food, and drink, and clothing. Your bread shall be sure; your water shall not fail; your raiment shall be provided. There is no promise of abundance or superfluity. These *may* fall to the lot of God's people, but they are not to be regarded in the light of covenanted blessings. Our Lord only forbids all restlessness and anxiety in regard to the common necessaries of life; and says that if we honestly strive to serve God *first*, these—the necessaries, not the luxuries of life—shall be ours. Nor does this promise ever fail. "The righteous are never forsaken." How can we think otherwise? The Word of the Lord is a tried word. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it; hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" The child of God may rest assured that if He put his trust in the Lord, "all his need shall be supplied;" and that "goodness and mercy shall follow him all the days of his life." And, oh, had he but faith in this truth, what a freedom he might have from the world's corroding and cankering care! Believer, about whose path anxieties are gathering, difficulties are thickening, "be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known unto God." Cast

your burthen upon the Lord; throw all your cares upon Him. And what shall happen? "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Oh, the blessedness! The happiness! Try this way more, my brother, and though you have neither honour nor riches, you will be a more enviable man than Solomon in all the pomp and splendour of his court. That there is a greater happiness than any that riches can give, a nobility far beyond any that mere rank can confer, we learn from the history of the Apostle Paul. Contrast Solomon on his throne of ivory and gold with Paul, "enduring a great fight of afflictions," and "made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." Which exhibits the truest example of moral grandeur? Look at Solomon, with all his wisdom and understanding, staining the lustre of his glory by abandoning his heart to sensual indulgences; by falling away into idolatry; and by departing in his old age from the Lord his God. Look at Paul, —the man in labours more abundant; the confessor, thrice beaten with rods; the sufferer, in prisons frequent; the martyr, in deaths oft, and "counting not his life dear unto himself for Christ's sake and the Gospel's." Hearken to Solomon's confession in his latter days,—listen to the mournful outpouring of a disappointed and wearied spirit,—"Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not

from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." Give ear to the words of Paul when having spent a life in nakedness, in fastings, in cold, in hunger, he tells out his experience for the good of the Church of Christ. Looking back on his sufferings; remembering how at one time he bled under the Roman scourge; how at another he smarted under the Jewish rods; how he had been a day and a night in the deep, and penning the words in a dungeon, he writes thus, — "I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content!" Solomon's confession at the close of life, when he was old and grey-headed, and about to go down to the narrow house which has been appointed for all living, was that of a broken heart, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Paul's confession, when he was about to mount the Roman scaffold, and to make bare his neck for the glittering axe, was this —"To me to live is Christ; to die is gain." Which is the nobler of the two? Learn therefore, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." What at their best and brightest were Solomon's pomp and splendour,

his silver and his gold, his houses, and gardens, and possessions? Taking us out to the dewy meadows, He that "spake as never man spake," a greater than Solomon, has shown us a delicate flower hiding its pure and pendent bells amidst the greenness of its leaves, and bidding us "consider the lilies of the field," has said, "I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And if the humblest flower that "wastes its sweetness on the desert air," excels in beauty the pomp and splendour of royal state, must we not believe that man's true adorning is inward holiness, not outward show? "The king's daughter is all glorious within." And just as perishing as earth's flowers is all human grandeur. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." So with man. There is one event to all. A coffin, a shroud, a few feet of earth await the man of most extensive rule, and broadest acres, and widest fame. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." The king shall not carry away his crown, nor the soldier his laurels. The bishop shall not carry away his mitre, nor the statesman his fame, nor the miser his gold. What, then, is all that we possess to be left behind? Yes, all treasures that are only of the earth—earthy. But the graces of the soul; the Divine gifts of

faith, and hope, and love; these abide for ever; they never perish; they survive death, outlive the grave, and accompany us into the eternity beyond. And when prophecies have failed, and tongues have ceased, and knowledge has vanished away, they will be an everlasting inheritance, a fadeless crown of glory and of joy. May we make them our own, seeking them in earnest prayer from Him who says to us as He did to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee!"

CHAPTER XVI.

The Night of Despondency.

"YET THE LORD WILL COMMAND HIS LOVINGKINDNESS IN THE DAYTIME, AND IN THE NIGHT HIS SONG SHALL BE WITH ME, AND MY PRAYER UNTO THE GOD OF MY LIFE."

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."—1 KINGS XIX. 4.

The Night of Despondency.

The Apostle James tells us expressly that "Elijah was a man of like passions as we are." This Night in the Desert is a striking confirmation of his words. We have presented to us here the only touch of weakness that appears in the loftiest and noblest spirit of his times. And it is well that this scene in the Prophet's life has been left on record for our learning, for otherwise we might look on Elijah as a man lifted out of the pale of our sympathies—placed beyond the reach of our imitation.

It may be remarked that the Bible is no portrait gallery of faultless characters. We have in its pages no pictures of lives of such high and impracticable excellence that we are unable to regard them as patterns and examples. On the contrary, the Bible exhorts us to be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" it shows us how the most honoured saints were

"compassed about with the same infirmities as ourselves." We see distrust and doubt in "the father of the faithful,"—base cunning and meanness in him who was "a prince," and "prevailed with God." We are told how "the meekest of men spake unadvisedly with his lips;" and how crimes the blackest and most hateful were committed by "the man after God's own heart." And now we shall see how Elijah, so grand, so brave, so independent, gives way to an unworthy spirit of impatience and querulous despondency. Yes, he whose life was employed in protesting against the false worship of Tyre and Sidon; who bearded king Ahab in his palace; who confronted the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal on Carmel; who shut and opened the heavens with his prayers, now seeks to escape persecution by an unbidden and inglorious flight.

The prophets of Baal had been destroyed. Elijah himself had led them down the mountain slopes to the river Kishon, and sword in hand had put them to death in one swift and terrible slaughter. Ahab's haughty spirit was humbled for the time. But Jezebel, his evil genius, his proud and cruel queen—a woman bold, cruel, relentless—remained undaunted and undismayed. When she was told all that Elijah had done, and withal, how he had slain all the prophets with the sword, she sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do

to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." The Prophet, who had never quailed before the face of man, trembles before the implacable queen. With his servant as his sole companion, he leaves the land of Israel, and flees for his life to Beersheba. But he tarries not here. Separating himself from his attendant, he plunges into the wilderness, and throwing himself under a juniper, prays that he may die. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Two especial thoughts rise naturally out of the subject, and these are full of interest and instruction.

First, let us search for the reason of the prophet's despondency, and secondly, let us examine the manner in which God applies Himself to cure the impatience of His servant. No doubt there were physical causes at work, which partly explain Elijah's weakness. There had been a long strain upon mind and body, and now he suffers a reaction. He had been wrought up to a great pitch of excitement, and the overstrung nerves avenge themselves by a natural failure in energy and force. He had lately stood alone on Carmel—the sole witness for Jehovah—confronted with the false-hearted king of Israel and a whole army of the prophets of Baal. And no sooner has he vindicated the claims of Jehovah, and extorted the cry from the people,

"The Lord, He is the God: the Lord, He is the God," than he has to wait for an answer to his prayer, in "the sound of an abundance of rain." Yonder from the mountain-top, in the rosy flush of an eastern sunset, the prophet's servant looks over the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea—the sky is cloudless—the sea is calm. Seven times the youth ascends and looks, and seven times there is nothing: at last he descries a fleecy cloud, like a white sail, on the edge of the deep. No bigger at first than "a man's hand," it grows, and gathers, and spreads, until it darkens the whole vault of heaven; and now, while the rain pours from the skies, and foaming torrents leap from crag to crag, and rushing winds shake the mighty trees, the king mounts his chariot, and is driven homeward through the storm. Elijah, his shaggy robe girt up about his loins, runs on before the startled horses, nor stops till, as night closes in, he reaches the entrance of Jezreel.

Now the excitement produced by such demands on his strength must have naturally told upon his frame, vigorous, and strong, and iron, as it was. Exhaustion must have followed efforts so great and so continuous. That depressing sense of weariness, which ever attends the over-tasked brain and the shattered nerves, overcame him. For body and mind act and react upon one another, and religious despondency is often the result of physical

depression. So "fearfully and wonderfully are we made," so close and mysterious is the union between the spiritual and animal organism, that we cannot overtax the strength, or neglect any of the laws of health, without feeling that physical derangement affects the emotions, the hopes and joys of the soul. Shattered nerves will raise a cloud between God and the soul, and will darken the mind with fear of spiritual desertion. I am persuaded that many of those cases of religious despondency which one meets with, when the soul, mourning after an absent God, "refuses to be comforted," and cries in vain for some token of God's presence, are to be traced to some bodily derangement, and are matters more for the physician's treatment than for the application of spiritual comfort or advice. If, therefore, we would maintain an equable and happy frame of mind, and rejoice in a religious experience not subjected to ebb and flow, flux and reflux, alternate elevation and depression, like the restless sea, that emblem of mutability, we must keep the body in health, and carefully guard it from every influence that would tend to make it a clog or burden on the soul. Well it would be for the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—if we ever acted on the apostolic rule, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And do not think that such exhortations as these—the duty of care

for the body, of keeping it in temperance, soberness, and chastity—are unbecoming our earnest and Christian consideration. Nothing can be unbecoming which bears upon our religious welfare, nor ought it to be forgotten that the body is worthy of all due honour as being redeemed by Christ, and as being, if we are true believers, "a temple of the Holy Ghost."

But there is another truth, akin to that on which we have been speaking; and this is, the peril that follows a season of religious excitement or impression. Elijah's feelings had been wound up to the highest pitch in his conflict with the priests of Baal, and yet here we find that the faith which sustained him has faltered, and lying under the juniper tree, he exclaims, "It is enough; now, O Lord."

Brethren, excitement has its value. There is a worth in anything—solemn sermon, or providential judgment, or painful discipline—that breaks up the old mechanical life which has become routine. We should be thankful to the agency, whatever it be, that stirs the stagnant waters of the soul, and makes us more serious, more in earnest, more intent on securing "the one thing needful." We are not half alive, any one of us, to the importance of eternity, to the value of salvation, to the preciousness of Christ. And, therefore, we should hail with gladness anything that breaks up the slum-

bers of the spiritual life, and, forcing us into the awful presence of God, makes us feel that there is something which requires to be done with all our might; that heaven must be won at every risk and cost.

But though excitement has its value, it has also its danger; there is the fear of reaction; the heart, like the body, and the mind, cannot be long exposed to extreme tension without giving way afterwards. Strong impressions are succeeded by corresponding listlessness. And how are you to guard against the peril? By carrying out the emotion that has been raised into action. There can be nothing more dangerous than to separate right feeling from right action: to allow good impulses to be still-born, instead of developing themselves into good deeds. My friend, never let the desire for better things subside, and pass away without producing fruit. Up and be doing. The more that the Divine strivings of the Spirit are felt within, in solemn impressions and anxious desires, the busier let us be—busier in the use of prayer, of ordinances of the Bible, and of all those means of grace through which the Spirit works, and impels the soul onward and upward in a heavenly course. These holy emotions, yearnings, thoughts, if yielded to and improved, will lead us to God; but if neglected, or permitted to die passively away, will leave us further from God than before,—the soul

buried under the hollow commonplaces of a superficial religion.

Another reason for Elijah's despondency was, no doubt, disappointment that a greater measure of success had not followed his efforts in the cause of the one true God. He knew "the sickness of the heart" arising from "hope deferred." On Carmel, Jehovah's claims on the worship of the people had been vindicated; Baal's priests had been slain, a false religion had been put down, and a reformation seemed about to commence. Yesterday all appeared bright and promising, to-day all was dark and threatening. Nothing had come of his recent triumph. The people still "halted between two opinions;" the priests were buried in formalism; the land was not cleared of idolatry; the wicked Jezebel was thirsting for revenge, and Ahab was as much under her evil influence as ever. The spiritual life of a nation was decaying. Success had not crowned the prophet's zeal. The sense of failure lay heavy on his large and tender heart. And thus there came moments of doubt and despondency. What, after all, had his life been worth? So in the deep anguish of a wounded spirit he threw himself under the juniper tree. Why labour any longer in a task so hopeless? All efforts and service seemed in vain. Better to die than to toil on in a work that meets with no better reward. And from the dis-

appointment of a sensitive soul, rose the pathetic cry, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

And is not this at times the mournful complaint of every teacher, preacher, reformer—of all earnest men who would seek to lead others from the ways of error into the paths of righteousness and truth? A life's toil has failed of producing the great results which they expected. How much we attempt; how little after all we are able to do. We set out with the idea that many lives shall be ennobled through our teaching; that we will win them to better things; that we shall so set before them the majesty of truth, and so convince them of the claims of God and of Christ, that they will gladly follow where we lead, and yield themselves willing captives to Him who bought them with His Son's blood. And we make a certain impression; some are "almost persuaded" to become Christians; they begin to do many things; to set about a certain measure of reform — but, alas! *there* our success ends, and we soon learn that our task has been a thankless one—that our labour has been well nigh spent in vain. After a few years we look back and ask, "Where are the earnest souls that we have been the means of winning to God? Where are the upright minds into which we have instilled the principles of truth? Where are the altered lives, the obedient hearts that we hoped for, nay,

reckoned on?" And we feel it hard to sow, and not to reap, to work, and gather in no fruit of our labours, and after years of toil to have to utter the cry of failure and disappointment, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" And then we begin to think, "I will throw up the work in which I have been engaged—I will no longer weary myself for very vanity; there is no hope of better things; defeat has been my only reward for much time given, much labour spent." Sometimes in very weariness we utter the cry of the Psalmist, "O that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest." We wish that all were over — that life, with its struggles, and sorrows, and failures, were at an end, and that, like tired children, we might lay us down on the bosom of mother earth, and be at peace. If we use not the words, yet ours is the spirit of Elijah, when in utter despondency he cast himself under the juniper tree, and cried, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

But let us now come to the dealings of God with Elijah in his utter despondency and impatient weariness of life.

And first, as his depression partly arose from physical causes, God takes care that his exhausted strength shall be recruited. "Tired nature's sweet

restorer, balmy sleep," descends in blessing on his worn-out frame, and wraps him for a season in forgetfulness. Then he is touched by angel hands, and thus tenderly awakened from his slumber, he finds that provision is made for his bodily wants. "Behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head." When his hunger is satisfied, he sinks again into a sweet and refreshing sleep, and is aroused the second time by the angel of the Lord, who a second time bids him "arise and eat," because "the journey" that lies before him is "too great" for his strength. See the tenderness and goodness of God! See how graciously He condescends to minister to the bodily wants of His servants, just supplying the very remedy most suited to their need. What Elijah required was rest and food, and this latter is miraculously provided. Nor does God address the prophet in one word of expostulation or rebuke, until his frame has been recruited, and he is able to bear the revelation of the Divine will. It is a remarkable instance of the lovingkindness of God, and as such is worthy of all observation.

It reminds one of that tender scene on the shores of the lake of Tiberias, after the Saviour's resurrection. The disciples had been fishing all night, and had caught nothing. Jesus stands on the shore in the early dawn, directs them where to cast their net, and waits until they drag to land

their miraculous draught of fishes. "And as soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread." And not until they had eaten, and the body was refreshed, did Jesus address them in those important words which He came there to deliver. May we learn the same delicate consideration for others, and bearing the infirmities of the weak, be in this "followers of God as dear children," and "walk in love, as Christ also loved us."

But the Lord has also a rebuke for the impatient spirit of His prophet. As he seeks shelter in a cave among the granite rocks of Horeb, there comes to him the voice of the Lord: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "Here," so far from the work to which thou wert called? "Here," so far from that court whose wickedness thou wert to rebuke, and from that people whose manners thou wert to reform? "What doest thou here," when there is so much to be done for the glory of thy God, and the good of thy fellow-men? "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." The prophet's patience is exhausted; he stands, he thinks, solitary against the world; he only is faithful among the faithless; the time has arrived

for God Himself to interfere, and to manifest Himself in judgment. God sends him an answer through the grand voice of nature. As he stands on the mountain-side, expecting the signs of the Divine presence, the Lord passes by, and "a great and strong wind," like the sound of a rushing hurricane, rends the mountains, and shivers the massive rocks in pieces. "But the Lord was not in the wind." The shock of a mighty earthquake follows, making the solid ground tremble under his feet. "But the Lord was not in the earthquake." And now in the darkness the hills are lighted up with flashes of fire, as though they flamed and burned, as they did in the olden time, when Jehovah descended on the mount. "But the Lord was not in the fire." But when all again is calm, and not a sound is heard, there comes, stealing through the darkness of the night, "a still small voice," so "still" that "nothing lives 'twixt it and silence." Elijah knows that God is here, and reverently covering his face in his mantle, he leaves the shelter of the cave, and stands at the entrance, under the solemn stars, to receive the Divine communication. And it may be—for there is some difficulty as to the precise lessons which, by means of these symbols of the Divine Majesty, God intended to teach the prophet—it may be that the Lord meant to convey this lesson to Elijah's heart, that "punishment is His strange

work," and that "He delighteth in mercy." The prophet's patience was exhausted, not God's. He might have swept away at once, with a swift and unsparing destruction, Ahab and his cruel queen, the idolatrous temples of Jezreel and Samaria, and the whole nation that had provoked Him to anger with their sins. He might have sent the rushing wind, and turned the whole country into a wilderness; or caused the earth to reel to and fro, and buried every city and village in Israel under a heap of ruins; or made the lightning His messenger, and scathed and scorched them with His fires. But His greatest power, He would say, is not in these—not in terror and in judgment—but in "the still small voice of love." He will therefore bear and forbear with them still, and seek by mercy to overcome their impatience and wandering.

So it ever is. It is the Gospel, not the law, that softens and melts men into penitence. How beautifully is the saving, healing power of the Gospel set forth in the words of Moses, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." No man yet was ever driven to God; he must be drawn to Him —"drawn by the cords of a man and the bands of love,"—as I wish to draw you. Oh, listen to "the still small voice," as it steals in mercy on your ears, and yield obedience to its messages of grace.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but would rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Oh, that thou mightest so hear and welcome these gracious words, that in thee, my brother, the promise might be fulfilled, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life."

Once more the Divine voice repeats the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" thou, the prophet of Israel, here in the deserts of Arabia? And again the human voice returns the despondent answer, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." And the answer from God is that the prophet's work is not yet done; that there is still a task before him; that life is for nobler purposes than vain lamentations over apparent failures. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus." The desert is to be a new starting point in his work for God. He is to go on through "good report and evil report; through honour and dishonour," in spite of a

king's hatred or a queen's opposition — though his own heart should fail him, and the world turn against him. And how it must have banished from Elijah's mind the last traces of despondency —how it must have braced up his soul, imparting to it a new energy—to know that God was not dissatisfied with his past efforts, and had need of his services still.

My brother, the sure remedy against all idle regrets and despondency, is to "go on our way" of active service, to be up and doing, to "forget the things that are behind, and to reach forth unto those that are above, and to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Life is still valuable if we can fight against sin, and be valiant for God; if we can encourage the weak and defend the oppressed; or heal the sorrows, and relieve the wretchedness, or improve the habits of those among whom we dwell. This is not the time to withdraw from the world, and consult for our own ease and indulgence — earth for the work, heaven for the reward. "There *remaineth* a rest for the people of God." Rise now to the dignities and duties of your Christian calling. Let every true servant of God feel that he has a mission — a great mission on earth. Let us work for the glory of God and the good of man; and seeking to leave this wretched world better than we found it, let us "sow beside

all waters," encouraged by the promise that "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

And, finally, God cured Elijah's depression by assuring him that his life had not been in vain; that he had the sympathy of many earnest hearts, though he knew it not; that he was not alone in his struggle against the wickedness of the times. Scattered throughout Israel, in the caves and forests of Carmel, unknown to him, perhaps unknown to each other, were seven thousand, whose "knees had not bowed unto Baal, whose mouths had not kissed him," who had not, by word or deed, acknowledged his power. And every one of these seven thousand may have watched the prophet's career from afar, and been emboldened by his dauntless courage. His example may have cheered and strengthened them in their allegiance to God; they may have derived courage for their resistance to evil, from his dauntless behaviour in Ahab's court, and before the prophets of Baal. His life had not been a failure; his influence had told for good in thousands of hearts in the nation. And though weaker in faith than he, none came and stood by his side on Carmel, none gathered round him in the streets of Jezreel, yet may they have ascribed to him, under God, the courage which braced their souls for duty.

Brother man, for a life spent in God's service, there can be no such thing as failure. We may

have more sympathy than we think for, when we struggle against the wickedness, the folly, the infidelity of the world. Many a one that we know not of, may be blessing us for the example we set, or be praying for the success of labours by which they themselves are encouraged to be steadfast for God. Let us never think that our labour in the Lord is in vain. Let us not be "weary in well doing," for "in due season we shall reap if we faint not." Let us "cast our bread on the waters," assured that we shall find it after many days. No word lovingly spoken; no work earnestly done; no sacrifice ungrudgingly made, shall ever be overlooked by God. "Even the cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, shall not lose its reward." Therefore "go on thy way," giving your labour, your time, your prayers, your money, your help in every form to the cause of God, and of His Christ. Live for the highest objects; live for the God that loves you; live for the Saviour that bled for you; live for the good of those around you; your motto—"The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then we are all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Sleepless Night.

"THOU HOLDEST MINE EYES WAKING."

"On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king."—ESTHER VI. 1.

The Sleepless Night.

The merest trifles have more than once produced an influence wide in its effects, lasting in its results. The slightest causes have given birth to the greatest events. A bird, on one occasion, changed the destinies of the world. The Eastern Impostor, flying from his enemies, took refuge in a certain cave. When his pursuers reached his hiding-place, they forebore to go in, because a dove had just alighted at the entrance, and they concluded that, if Mohammed were there, the bird would have been disturbed before. That bird saved the life of the false prophet, and thus enabled Mohammed to overrun kingdoms with his armies, and to establish a superstitious religion, which is widely received to this day, and numbers more adherents than the purest form of Christianity. But bigger with importance was "the Sleepless Night" passed by the Persian king in the palace of Shushan. It is not too

much to say that on it hinged the redemption of the world.

A most remarkable chapter in the history of God's providence has been written for our learning in the Book of Esther. Let us trace it throughout, and read it in the light which is thrown upon it by the lamp of God. Ahasuerus, who reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces, made in the third year of his reign a feast to all his princes and servants. Within the walls of his royal palace he displayed before his guests "the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, for an hundred and fourscore days." When these protracted revellings, in which the nobles from the more distant provinces were entertained, were concluded, the king gave another costly banquet to all who were in Shushan, both great and small. The festivities on this occasion were continued for seven days in the court of the garden of the palace. On the last day of the feast a circumstance occurred which disturbed the harmony that had hitherto prevailed. Ahasuerus, being heated with wine, commanded, in defiance of all the customs of the country and the feelings of the age, that Vashti, the queen, should be brought before him, adorned with the crown royal, that he might show the people and the princes her beauty. The queen naturally and most pro-

perly refused, and on her refusal hung the safety of the Jewish people. How wonderful are the ways of God! The king's intemperance, and the queen's disobedience to his drunken wish, were the apparently slight incidents which were to issue in consequences the most momentous. Vashti's refusal to appear unveiled at the royal banquet excited the anger of the king, and, acting on the advice of his counsellors, he caused a law to be enacted, that she should come no more before him, and that her rank and state should be given to another. Accordingly, Vashti was degraded; and to share the bed of the despotic and voluptuous monarch, another queen was sought for amongst all the fair young virgins throughout the several provinces of his kingdom. Now it happened, in the providence of God, that there was a certain man residing in Shushan, whose name was Mordecai, a Jew, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity, when Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, was dethroned by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. His uncle's daughter, Hadassah, or Esther, as she is more commonly called, had been left an orphan, and on the death of her parents Mordecai took her for his own child. And so it came to pass that Esther was brought, amongst the other maidens, unto Shushan, unto the king's house, and was delivered to the custody of the keeper of the women. Here she obtained

favour from the chief of the eunuchs above all the other maidens committed to his care, and was treated with more than usual indulgence and respect. This was but the prelude to higher honours; for when Esther was brought before Ahasuerus she obtained grace and favour in his sight, more than all the other virgins; and he set the crown royal on her head, and made the orphan Jewess queen, instead of Vashti. Her cousin Mordecai also shared the favour of the king, and was promoted to an office of some trust and responsibility, for we read that "he sat in the king's gate." While he filled this confidential post, he was fortunate enough to discover the treasonable plot of two of the king's chamberlains who kept the door, and sought to assassinate their royal master. He immediately informed Esther, who disclosed to the king the traitorous design which her cousin had detected, and she certified the same in Mordecai's name. Upon careful investigation, the dark and bloody conspiracy was traced and crushed, the guilty men were put to death, and the memorable event was "written in the book of the chronicles before the king."

We are now introduced to the history of a personage who has an important part to play in this Eastern tale. Haman, the Agagite, is advanced by Ahasuerus above all the princes that are with him; and all the servants of the king

are commanded to do him reverence. Mordecai alone refuses to bow before the haughty favourite. He, a Jew, will not do homage to a descendant of the idolatrous Agag. This independent behaviour excites the anger of the proud Haman; and the homage of thousands affords him no pleasure, because this one man refuses the reverence which he claims. However, Mordecai alone is too humble an object for his wrath; he will have a great revenge; and so he lays a wicked scheme for the destruction of all the Jews throughout the kingdoms over which Ahasuerus reigned. In order to ascertain what particular day will be most suitable for his purpose, Haman has recourse to the superstitious custom of "casting the lot." In this manner he learns that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—nearly a whole year hence—will be the most favourable time. The hand of God was in this. Here behold a proof of the wise king's words, "Though the lot be cast into the lap, the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord." There can be no doubt that the wicked scheme was delayed so long to the intent that it might be defeated, and the crafty and cruel plotter be taken in his own net. Haman obtains the king's consent to his bloody purpose, promising to pay ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasuries; and it is decreed that there shall be a massacre of the Jews throughout the provinces

of the kingdom. Letters to this effect, written in the name of Ahasuerus, and sealed with the king's ring, are sent to the governors and lieutenants and rulers of every province within the realm. These "letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." "The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace." The plot having succeeded so far, all things being in proper train for the massacre, "the king and Haman sit down to drink." Haman rejoices in the success of his plans; and the king,—what cares he for the destruction of so many lives? Human life is of but little value in the eyes of the Eastern despot. So there, these two men of blood sit at the festive board, and drain the wine-cup, and drown in the flowing bowl all thoughts of sweet mercy or tender pity. What a dark and revolting picture! But why do "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

Meanwhile "the city Shushan is perplexed." The people tremble when they hear the royal decree. What safety have they against the cruelty of so wicked and so absolute a king? No wonder they are disquieted and alarmed.

As soon as Mordecai hears the enactment he rends his clothes, and puts on sackcloth and ashes, and with a loud and bitter cry betakes himself to the king's gate. His sorrow and grief are reported to Esther, who immediately despatches one of the king's chamberlains to inquire the reason of her cousin's distress. Mordecai sends her a copy of the cruel edict, and charges her to make supplication unto the king in behalf of her people. This, after some reluctance, Esther promises to do; for Ahasuerus had not called her into his presence for thirty days; and it was death either for man or woman to pass into the inner court uninvited, except for those to whom the king should hold out the golden sceptre. The queen, however, resolves to follow the path of duty at all hazards; she will save her nation or perish in the attempt. She commands Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan to a solemn fast on her behalf. She and her maidens likewise fast for three days; and, strengthened by her own and the people's prayers, she resolves at all hazards to go in unto Ahasuerus with the noble words on her lips, "If I perish, I perish." On the third day she puts on her royal

robes and her jewelled crown, and pale, though calm, passes into the inner court, into the very presence of the king. But her prayer has been heard. He who "has the hearts of kings in His hand as the rivers of water, and turneth them whithersoever He will," gives her favour in her husband's sight. No sooner does he see her than he stretches out the golden sceptre; and when she has joyfully advanced to the throne, and touched it, he says, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom." Esther merely asks the presence of the king and Haman at a banquet; for before she can venture to present the request which lies nearest to her heart, she must win again the confidence and affection of her husband, who has estranged himself from her for so long. The king readily complies, and at this banquet a second time declares that he will grant whatsoever she may desire. Not yet prepared to make known her wishes, she invites the king and Haman to come again on the morrow to another feast, and promises that then she will unreservedly make known her petition.

Haman leaves the palace with a glad and exulting heart, happy in standing so high in the good graces of Ahasuerus and his queen. On his way home, however, he passes the king's gate, where Mordecai sits, and there is an end to his triumph,

for the Jew does not stand up nor move for the proud favourite. This is like wormwood to Haman. Filled with indignation and suppressed anger, he hastens home, where he throws off all disguise, and gives vent to the wrath of his sorely-galled and swelling heart. Calling for his friends and his wife, he tells them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and of his promotion by the king, and how he has been advanced above the other princes and servants, and how the queen has shown him favour; and he winds up the tale of his honours in the words of disappointed ambition and wounded pride: "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then said Zeresh his wife, and all his friends, "Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king into the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman, and he caused the gallows to be made." So Haman, feeding his cruel heart with the thought of his great revenge on the morrow, retires to rest, and his slaves spend the night in raising the gallows and preparing for the deed of blood. Mordecai, all unconscious of the murderous plot which has been laid against him—anxious only for the fate of his people, seeks the solitude of his chamber, and commits himself to the guardian care of his fathers'

God. And how is that night spent by the king in the luxurious palace of Shushan? How? "On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." You will remember how the portion of these records which was read to the restless monarch contained an account of the service rendered by Mordecai in discovering the conspiracy against the king's life. This at once led to the promotion of the Jew, the degradation and death of Haman, and, as a consequence, to the preservation of the whole Hebrew race.

It is necessary thus to recall the principal points in this most interesting story—a story which is as strange and stirring as any tale of Oriental romance,—that we may be prepared for the lessons which are to be gathered from the king's sleepless night in the palace of Shushan.

And, in the first place, we observe the remarkable illustration which it gives of God's providence.

The King of Persia, in his despotic cruelty, and in compliance with the wicked counsel of his favourite courtier, has signed a decree for the extermination of the Jewish people. Mordecai the Jew, who alone of all his nation has influence with the queen, and through her upon her husband, is to be put to death on the morrow; and Haman, when the deed has been done, will be a more powerful enemy

than ever to the chosen people of God. On the night before the day appointed for Mordecai's execution, the king retires to rest, but he cannot sleep. "Gentle sleep, nature's soft nurse," refuses to weigh his eyelids down, or "steep his senses in forgetfulness." For wealth and greatness cannot command the sweet influences of repose. Often will downy slumber fly "the perfumed chambers of the great," and leave the kingly couch to "lie in smoky cribs," or "on the high and giddy mast to seal the ship-boy's eyes," and "rock his brains in cradle of the rude imperious surge." So Ahasuerus finds it. Sleep will not visit his pillow. Why? It were vain to speculate on the immediate and natural causes of his restlessness. There may have been no assignable reason. It may have been the heat of an Eastern night,—some incident that happened during the day; it may have been some small and trifling thing which kept him turning and tossing on a sleepless bed. But whatsoever the cause that made the king wakeful, the hand of God is to be evidently seen in the fact that on that night slumber deserted his pillow. To employ the words of the psalmist, "God held his eyes waking." There was nothing miraculous in the means used to effect the sleeplessness of the king; all fell out, as we should say, in the ordinary course of events. Yet observe, but for this circumstance, that sleep fled

the King of Persia's couch on this particular night — but for the restlessness which it caused, he would not have sent for "the chronicles of the kingdom," or had read to him the story of Mordecai's forgotten service. And mark again the hand of God in the solace chosen by Ahasuerus! Does it not seem strange that the king should resort to such a measure for the purpose of beguiling the weariness of that sleepless night? Who would have supposed that this voluptuous monarch would have sought soothing in the dry chronicles of the kingdom? Rather should we have expected to hear that he called for instruments of music— for the song, or the dancing-girl, or the wine-cup, that so the tedious hours might pass away in pleasures congenial to his taste. Surely there was a special providence at work in the manner in which the king was led to seek entertainment on this sleepless night. And was there not as special a providence in the opening of that page of the chronicles to which the reader turned the attention of the king? How did it come to pass that his eye rested upon the very place where Mordecai's name was recorded? He might as well have read out to the king from another roll of the book, or he might have closed the volume before he had reached the registered incident of the Jew's faithfulness. Why was neither done? Is there any solution which can be offered but the one which

resolves these marvellous incidents into the special operations of a Divine providence? None. The hand of God is as clearly to be seen in the several incidents of that sleepless night as when it wrought plague and prodigy in the land of Egypt—as when it arrested the sun in mid-heaven over Gibeon, and brought up the wondering moon to gaze at him across the valley of Ajalon—as when it traced the mysterious scroll on the walls of Belshazzar's palace, and struck terror to the heart of the trembling monarch. There is no instance of God's providence on record more remarkable than that which is given in the simple, though striking statement of the inspired historian: "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king."

This truth will appear all the clearer when we think of the amazing interests which were dependent on that "sleepless night." It was not alone Mordecai's life that was at stake; it was not alone the existence of the Jewish nation that turned on the wakeful hours of the king. No. Higher, grander, more world-wide interests than these; for since "salvation is of the Jews," it is not too much to say that the redemption of mankind hung suspended on that "sleepless night." Had the decree been put into execution which commanded the destruction of the whole Hebrew race,

what would have become of the promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head"? The light of the world would have been quenched in darkness, and prophecy would have proved no better than "a cunningly-devised fable." Humanly speaking, if it had not been for the apparently slight accident that the King of Persia could not sleep, and that, to make the tedious hours of the night pass more pleasantly, he called for the chronicles of his kingdom, never would angel tongues have been heard in the starry skies which overhung Bethlehem, singing of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." Connecting cause and effect, may we not say that never would the blessed feet of the Son of God have walked our weary world — never would His heavenly voice have fallen in tones of tenderness on the ears of the heavy-laden —never would aching heads have laid them down on His blessed bosom, or weary hearts have come to Him seeking rest for their cares? But for this, our curse had not been exhausted, our iniquity borne, our penalty endured; never had the cup of trembling been wrung out to the dregs, nor the cross been erected on Calvary, nor "the blood been shed which cleanseth from all sin." But for this, heaven had never been filled with a rejoicing company gathered from all countries, and kindreds, and climes, and languages—never had the songs

of saints ascended to the throne—never had the crowns of the ransomed been cast at the feet of the Lamb, or the voices of the saved mingled in the loud ascription of praise, "Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" Say not that this language is too strong, because God could have used other means besides the sleeplessness of the Persian monarch to ensure the safety of the Jewish people, and through them the salvation of the world. No doubt He could. But the question before us is not what He might have done, but what He did. And as the wakefulness of Ahasuerus led to the honour of Mordecai, the hanging of Haman, and the preservation of the people from whom Messiah sprang, may it not be said, with all soberness, that the salvation of the Church turned on the incident so simply stated in the text, "On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king"?

What reason we have to thank God for the record of that sleepless night passed in the palace of Shushan! It unveils to us some of the deep mysteries of the providence of God. It shows us how God governs all His creatures and all their actions, restrains the malice of the wicked, and causes "all things to work together for the good of them that love Him." It illustrates in Mordecai's preservation

the truth of the beautiful statement of the Psalmist, "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." And it equally illustrates in Haman's fall the truths of those other words of the Psalmist, "Behold the wicked, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief; he made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made: his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon himself." Surely we may exclaim, "Verily there is a God which judgeth in the earth." Oh, let the righteous rejoice in the blessed assurance that God is "about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways;" and that in His watchful care He "will preserve our going out and coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore." He that numbers the stars, numbers the very hairs of our head. How such a happy belief should banish anxious thoughts, and dispel corroding cares: for whatever betide, whatever befall, whether joy or sorrow, sickness or health, gain or loss, advantage or disappointment, all is controlled and overruled by the living wisdom of our God for the believer's happiness and peace. And let us remember that all events have a double point of view,—a heavenward and an earthward. As seen under these different lights, they wear totally different aspects.

Look at Haman's plot as it appeared to men on the night when the gallows-tree was erected for the Jew. How successful it seemed: how certain the death of the doomed Mordecai! Look at the same scheme as it appeared to God who was about to put the wicked to confusion, and to overrule the enemy's craft for His servant's good. What different aspects does it assume!

Travellers in Alpine countries tell us that when in early morning they have wound their way down some steep mountain-pass, they have seen far below, between them and the plain, a cloud floating in mid-air, tinged with many a glowing colour caught from the rising sun. There, reflecting the most gorgeous tints—amber, and ruby, and emerald —it has hung like a bright and pendent jewel in the morning sky. But, strange to say, the traveller who, ascending from the valley beneath, pursues an upward path, sees the same cloud hanging a misty vapour in the sky, cold and dark—a vapour which, rolling in between the sun and himself, arrests the warm rays, and shrouds him in its chilling shadow. Even so is it with many of the providences of God: viewed from the heavenward side they are bright with mercy; viewed from the earthward, they appear dark and threatening. Let us then ever endeavour to look upon trying dispensations as though we had heaven for our standing-point, and we shall not fail to see the goodness of God

casting a bright light on the bosom of the blackest cloud.

Would you learn that the Lord is mindful of His own? Turn your eyes on another and humbler chamber in Shushan than that in the palace where the king spent his sleepless night. How did Mordecai pass the hours of darkness during which the king was tossing on a restless couch? Though it is not stated in the narrative, yet may we not suppose that the Jew retired to rest trusting in the God of his fathers; believing that the prayers which had been offered would be heard, and that his nation would be delivered from the threatened destruction. The slumber which was in vain courted by the king in his luxurious palace, may have visited the Jew in his humbler abode. "For," to use the beautiful words of David, "so God giveth his beloved sleep." Is there not something striking in the thought that as Mordecai "laid him down, and slept, and took his rest," for the Lord was making him dwell in safety, he was an object of interest in the palace of Ahasuerus and in the dwelling of Haman! He himself was all unconscious of the regard he was attracting from the sleepless king, who was consulting for his honour, and also from the cruel enemy who was making ready the gallows-tree on which he was to hang on the morrow. A mighty friend and a powerful foe were equally occupied and engrossed with the

fortunes of the humble Jew. Is there anything here for our learning? Much. Are not all the powers of heaven and hell interested in the salvation or destruction of the child of God? Is not the very meanest believer an object of the deepest regard to "the King of kings;" does not "He that never slumbers," watch over his fortunes, guide his way, and surround his steps by angel guards? And, on the other hand, does not the enemy of souls ever plot his ruin, and lay snares for his destruction? May we not say concerning him, in the words of the Lord to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"? We cannot see the conflict that is carried on by the opposing powers of light and darkness: nay, we may be in a great measure unconscious of it, but it is not on that account less real or less true. But of the issue to the child of God there can be no doubt. "Greater is he that is for us than he that is against us." What was it to Mordecai, when assured of the king's favour, that Haman wore a scowling brow and a frowning face? Nothing. What is it to us, assured of the love of Him to whom all power is given in heaven and earth—the King of kings and Lord of lords, —that the enemy hates and would destroy us? Nothing. Less than nothing. Let Christians be of good courage. Blessed for ever be our God.

"We shall be made more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us." "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly:" and having fought the good fight, and finished our course, we shall join in the cry of triumph, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

As a concluding thought, we may now consider Mordecai as a type of the believer. You will remember how, when the king wished to confer some honour upon the Jew for the service that had been recorded in the chronicles of the kingdom, he called in Haman to his counsels. Haman, supposing that he was the man whom the king was about to honour, thus tendered his advice:—"Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." So the Jew was brought forth, and in royal state was led along the crowded streets, whilst the crestfallen Haman walked by his side, and ever and anon raised up his voice to proclaim, "Thus shall it be done unto the man

whom the king delighteth to honour." Now in these honours which Mordecai received, when he was delivered from the hand of the enemy, we have a figure of the glory that awaiteth the believer. Is it not written concerning him, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth in judgment against thee, God shall condemn"? Will not God bring forth the righteousness of His own people as the light, and their judgment as the noonday? When the solemn day of account comes, will not the child of God, rising from the humiliation of the grave, be found clothed upon with the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, and adorned with the graces of the Holy Spirit; and shall not the crown royal be set upon his head, and shall he not be stationed at the King's right hand in the high places of heaven? For "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is ever at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Christ shall be "glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe in that day." And at this solemn act of coronation, the august assembly of the skies will assist, acknowledging the grace and goodness of the Judge in His dealings with the saints, and saying one to another, as they see the believer robed with light, and crowned with

glory, "Thus it is done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour!"

Are our names "written in the chronicles of the kingdom"? Are they in the "Lamb's Book of Life"? How are we to know? Has human eye ever gazed on the volume of eternity, or looked upon the wondrous page wherein have been traced by the pen of God the names and number of His elect? How then can we know whether God has chosen us? The surest proof that God has chosen us, is that we have chosen Him. Have we done so? Is He "all our salvation, and all our desire"? Full of infirmity though we be — frail, weak, imperfect, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit," corruption still powerful within, can we yet say with the fallen but restored Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee"? If you can say that, happy are you! blessed are you! Loving Him because He first loved you, "God shall perfect that which concerneth you." And when earth has been exchanged for heaven, and "the fine linen, clear and white," has been given you as an everlasting robe, and the blood-bought crown has been placed on your brows, and you stand before the throne, loving angels, pointing to you as the heir of a kingdom which passeth not away, shall exclaim, "Thus is it done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour!"

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